

RECONTEXTUALIZING CHURCH:
FROM AN ATTRACTIONAL-EVENTS & PROGRAM-DRIVEN MODEL
TO A MISSIONAL-COMMUNITY & CELL-DRIVEN MODEL

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BY
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To my wife whom I adore, Mary Kay Faust, and to my four children, you are precious.

Our lives *are* the evangelistic events. Our life together is the apologetic.

— Steve Timmis, *Everyday Church*, 89.

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ABBREVIATIONS

DMin: Doctor of Ministry. This may refer to the program or the degree, depending on context.

DNA: This refers to the structure or traditions of a particular church or denomination.

DNA groups: Discipleship Nurture and Accountability groups of Doxa church, similar to “Bands” within the Methodist Tradition.

HC: Home Community. This refers to cell groups at Grace Church Seattle.

HG: Home Gathering. This refers to cell groups at Taproot Church in Burien, Washington.

IG: Intergenerational Groups. This refers to multigenerational cell groups in Joel Comiskey’s context.

MC: Missional Community. This refers to cell groups in many Acts 29 Network churches such as Jeff Vanderstelt’s church, Doxa.

MDiv: Master of Divinity. This refers to the degree.

MOPs: Mothers of Preschoolers. This refers to a program to minister to mothers of young children, both church and unchurched.

GLOSSARY

Apostles' Teaching: This could reference the actual preaching and teaching of the Apostles in the first century or the body of material compiled in the form of kerygma, doxology, creedal statements, or the writings of the New Testament.

Attractional Events: Events put on by a church with the intention to attract a crowd and make purposeful connections with the “churched,” “unchurched,” and “dechurched.” Usually these events include a presentation of the gospel.

Cell-Driven Church: A church of multiple cell-groups, which are the program of the church outside of the Sunday worship celebration. This term is used synonymously with “cell-group church.”

Cell-Group: A small group of three to fifteen people that purpose to edify one another, serve each other, and work together for outreach, discipleship, and multiplication. Besides the family, this is the smallest unit in a church body.

Cell-Group Church: This is a church made up of multiple cell-groups, which meet for worship celebration under one leadership (i.e., one united elder team). This term is used synonymously with “cell-driven church.”

Church, Ekklesia: This could refer to a church building or to the people who make up a local church fellowship or to the Church Universal made up of all saints past, present, and future, depending on the context in which it is used.

Coaching: After a cell-group leader has been trained and equipped, the leader is shepherded and held accountable through coaching by a zone coach.

Disciple: Follower of Jesus. This may refer to those who were literally called by Jesus to follow Him or those who believe in and are following Jesus' teachings today, depending on the context.

Disciple, Mathetes: used to describe a “disciple” in the New Testament.

Disciples, Christianoi: “Christians” or followers of Christ who were first called by this title in Antioch (see Acts 11:26).

Discipleship: The process of taking on an apprentice to make into a disciple of Jesus.

Discipleship, Akoloutheo: “To call a disciple” to literally follow a master in a master-pupil relationship. This verb is used synonymously with mathano and opiso mou.

Discipleship, Didasko: “To teach,” with reference to making disciples of Jesus in line with His teachings of the New Testament (see Matthew 28:19-20; Ephesians 4:20-21).

Discipleship, Mathano: “To disciple,” used in the Gospels to describe an apprentice or follower of a rabbi or of Jesus.

Discipleship, Matheteuo: The word used by Jesus in the Great Commission to command His disciples to go “make disciples” (see Matthew 28:19).

Discipleship, Mimeomai: “To imitate” a leader or Christ (see 1 Corinthians 11:1).

Discipleship, Opiso Mou: Used synonymously with akoloutheo, meaning “to come after me,” this is the simplest call of discipleship in the Gospels (see Mark 1:17).

Disciple-Making: The process of outreach and discipleship for reproduction of disciples who make disciples.

Edification: “To build up” fellow Christians by applying spiritual gifts in community.

Elder: Overseers of a church who shepherd as lay and vocational pastors (1 Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17-18; Titus 1:5-9; Hebrews 13:7, 17; and 1 Peter 5:1-4).

Equipping: Discipleship through teaching and hands-on experience to do the work of ministry (see Ephesians 4:11-16).

Evangelism: To share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the intent to win converts, save souls, and make disciples.

Evangelism, Euangelion: The “good news” or “gospel.” In the New Testament this refers to the announcement of the kerygma of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Evangelism, Euangelizesthai: To announce the gospel, synonymous with kerysso.

Evangelism, Kerygma: The content of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Evangelism, Kerysso: To preach the gospel, used synonymously with euangelizesthai.

Evangelist, Euangelistes: A herald or a preacher of good news, synonymous with keryx.

Evangelist, Keryx: A preacher of the gospel, used synonymously with euangelistes.

Evangelist, Martyr: To be a witness for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Fellowship, Koinonia: Sharing or participation in community to meet one another's physical, spiritual, material, or emotional needs; or this could refer to "the fellowship," a group of people who share in common, depending on the context.

Gospel: This could reference a "good news" announcement or specifically the kerygma of Jesus Christ or one of the four Gospels, depending on the context.

Great Commission: The final words of Jesus commanding His followers to continue making disciples to the ends of the earth (e.g., Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8).

Missional: A lifestyle of evangelism by taking the everyday stuff of life and turning it into a mission opportunity to live out the implications of and/or share the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

People of "the Way": Disciples who followed the ways of Jesus in community (Acts 9:2).

Program-Driven Church: A church that uses programs that tend to be curriculum based in order to make disciples, usually in a church building.

Programs: A pre-packaged ministry with curriculum designed to help ministers and lay people reach out to unbelievers and/or make disciples.

Revival: The Holy Spirit's quickening of one's spiritual sense that awakens the soul leading to confession, repentance, and commitment to Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Zone: A section of a city where cell groups are linked together for fellowship, outreach, and with oversight from a zone coach.

Zone Coach: A person who shepherds cell group leaders, holds them accountable, and purposes to bring leaders and groups together for ministry in a zone.

ABSTRACT

This thesis-project explores the challenges pastors might face in shepherding a program-driven church in how to reach out to the community outside of the four walls of the church building. This thesis evaluates Jesus' method of outreach and discipleship, and seeks to find ways to apply His methodology. This work explores various small group models throughout history and in today's contemporary Western context. I have interviewed four pastors who have successfully shepherded churches through recontextualization from attractional-events and programs to become missionally minded and cell-driven. In the end I have mapped out a strategy for how pastors can lead their churches through this transition.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

Introduction

Billy Graham's nephew Kevin Ford said, "Consumerism is individualism on steroids. It is the logical end product of living for self. Consumerism paves the way for the worship of self, and self-worship leaves us alone with the object of our devotion."¹ This is counter to the gospel and yet many North American Evangelicals have tended to respond to the consumer culture by using a consumer methodology of attractional events to draw a crowd and the program-driven model to make disciples. This is not to suggest that disciples cannot be made in this model, but I question if this is the most effective model for outreach and discipleship.

I would argue the more a church embraces the consumer mindset, the less likely it is that church will produce disciples who make disciples in relational community. As congregants learn to depend on events and programs at-the-church building to make disciples, events and programs become like a crutch that enables laypeople to depend on the professionals to do the work of disciple-making. Is there a more effective way to mobilize a congregation to go out into the world to make disciples like Jesus did with the Apostles in the Gospels and Acts.

The problem I see in many attractional-event and program-driven churches in North American is their system does a good job of producing converts, but not necessarily of producing disciples who are equipped to make disciples (Matthew 28:19). Many churches in our country seem to have drifted from the biblical concept of "church" and have redefined it as the place, a building, where ministry happens. Hence, many

1. Kevin G. Ford, *Transforming Church: Bringing out the Good to Get the Great* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2008), 59.

evangelicals have built large, centralized institutions using what seems like marketing as a formula for success. Utilize attractional events to draw a crowd, and then develop programs and depend on professional clergy to keep people coming back. While this may have worked to build large communities of worship in the mid-to-late twentieth century, it has also consumed many of the smaller churches like a Wal-Mart monopoly putting out of business the mom-and-pop shops. And often when the pastor of a program-driven church leaves, that church tends to lose sight of the vision, it tends to struggle to pull together in unity, and the congregation shrinks as people transfer to the new, next, and better program-driven church that meets their family's needs. This doesn't build biblical community; this fractures community among local churches, as the competitive mindset takes over and as church leadership begins to use marketing techniques to promote their brand to attract church shoppers, and thus congregants shuffle from church to church.²

My Experience in Program-Driven Churches

In eighteen years of vocational ministry, in three different ministry contexts I have observed much transfer growth with little commitment to community. In my first vocational ministry position as a Junior High Youth Director I observed many students and adults make decisions to "accept" Christ as Savior, but more than half drifted from church, and a majority was lost in the crowd. At this church, the staff found it difficult to disciple students and adults in a classroom and lecture-only methodology. The youth pastor suggested we transition the youth ministry from the Purpose-Driven Saddleback model to a cell group model of ministry (the first time I heard of this methodology).

2. For further reading see William Chadwick, *Stealing Sheep: The Church's Hidden Problems with Transfer Growth* (Downer Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2001); see also Kent Hughes and Barbara Hughes, *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

However, we didn't understand what this would look like or how to implement cell groups in an attractional-events and program-driven church, and so we abandoned the idea.

After four years of explosive growth, the senior pastor resigned because of a leadership division. He wanted to continue the Saddleback methodology, but the elders wanted to focus on discipleship. The leaders couldn't unify around a system, thus key leaders resigned, and church attendance was cut in half January 2003.

Around this time I graduated from seminary and changed ministry contexts to be under a disciple-making pastor doing Youth and College-Career ministry in the state of Washington. I was done with the attractional and program-driven model as it felt like "franchising" (i.e., take this McDonald's packaging, do it this way, and you will have a successful McDonald's restaurant) and decided to focus on youth group, Bible studies, and a college-career group in my home. The groups I led slowly grew in numbers, but they capped out based on my availability. Again the ministries were dependent on the vocational pastor and his ability to exegete and teach a text of scripture. This was not producing disciples who in turn could make disciples. I was simply feeding Bible knowledge to students without developing disciples who could make disciples.

In these first two ministry contexts I experientially learned what Francis Schaeffer describes in his essay *Two Contents, Two Realities*, "Our churches have often been two things – preaching points and activity generators."³ He was commenting on the fact the modern church in the West looks nothing like the first century church in the *Book of Acts*, a common complaint I have heard from Christians in their 20s and 30s. But Schaeffer also gives a solution to reach people within and without the church:

There is a tradition (it is not in the Bible) that the world said about the Christians in the early church, "Behold, how they love each other." As we read Acts and the epistles, we realize that these early Christians were really struggling for a

3. Francis Schaeffer, *25 Basic Bible Studies: Including Two Contents, Two Realities* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), 140.

practicing community. We realize that one of the marks of the early church was a real community, a community that reached down all the way to their care for each other in their material needs.⁴

This is the kind of church I longed to be a part of. This is the kind of church the world desperately needs to see to validate the gospel to skeptics and the dechurched.

Realizing there's a More Biblical Model

I desired to lead a church that lives out what Schaeffer describes, but I had never seen this kind of community in reality until I attended the 2006 CBNorthwest Annual Enrichment Conference on “The Gospel” (March 6-9, 2006, at Skamania Lodge in Skamania, Washington). One of the main speakers was Jeff Vanderstelt who at the time was lead pastor of Soma Communities in Tacoma, Washington. He spoke on how to live on mission as a gospel community to reach the “de-churched” and the “un-churched” in the Pacific Northwest. By “de-churched” Vanderstelt meant those who used to attend church but no longer see the importance of regularly attendance on Sundays. By “un-churched” he meant those who have never been a part of a church. In his message he preached on Ephesians 2:8-10, focusing on verse 10 to say that the gospel does not end with one’s personal salvation (2:8-9), rather the gospel goes on to speak about a Christian’s identity in Christ as God’s workmanship for the purpose of service in line with what Jesus has prepared in advance for each of us to do. Vanderstelt spoke of his experiences planting Soma in 2004 with a missional vision of a gospel community reaching the lost through everyday interactions with neighbors. Through illustration he explained the difference between attractional-events and platform-driven ministry dependent on the paid professional versus pastors equipping the saints to work together in missional community. Vanderstelt’s teachings resonated with my heart. I realized the

4. Schaeffer, 25 *Basic Bible Studies*, 140.

emphasis of ministries I had been part of was platform-driven, focusing on numbers as the barometer of the success. I realized “discipleship” was dependent on the pastor’s ability to communicate to a crowd. People were not being developed as disciples and they were not discovering or using their spiritual gifts to be used in the context of small groups, let alone in the context of events and programs. I recognized the reality I had been observing, people were being taught that Christianity is about sitting and watching someone else do ministry. But this is not biblical disciple-making in community.

To make a long story short, the church I was part of (a congregational and Baptist church) fell apart after the senior pastor retired in 2008. During this time I was the only pastor on staff but I was not given authority to lead, and so I focused on spinning the plates of the various programs we offered. Several deacons resigned as church attendance dropped off for lack of unified leadership and consistent preaching (the board invited guest speakers for five months, some of which were qualified and gifted, others were hit-and-miss). In my attempt to stop the bleeding I called Mark Hoeffner, CBNorthwest Area Director. He spoke with every deacon individually and diagnosed the problem as a lack of discipleship and leader development. Hoeffner conducted a seminar on elder training (January 6-8, 2009), but the deacons did not embrace the principles taught in this seminar, nor did they want to put this into practice saying, “That’s the job of the senior pastor.” I realized my time at this church had run its course. I sought advice from Hoeffner who recommended I resign and seek training from him as he would equip me to pastor a church coming out of a similar situation with humble leadership willing to work together to make disciples.

The Problem in My Current Ministry Context

I currently pastor Grace Church in West Seattle Washington. This church has a similar history to the churches I served previously. Grace was established in 1953 with a

focus on evangelism to the White Center, Burien, and West Seattle area. This church began to peak in effectiveness reaching this neighborhood in the late 1970s under Pastor Ed Shaw, resulting in the construction of the current facility in 1982 seating as many as 964 in the auditorium.⁵ I've heard it stated that this space was consistently filled to capacity during that era with two worship services. When Shaw transitioned to a new ministry in 1989, Grace began to lose focus, turned inward, attendance dwindled, and membership decreased from 695 to 478 in three years.⁶ The church had five different pastors from 1990 to 2004, each with a different focus.⁷ Finally, the leadership realized this was a major problem when they began to divide over worship style and non-essentials beginning Easter Sunday 2002. Within a year and a half all the pastors resigned and church attendance decreased to about 200. The leadership called the CBNorthwest office. Hoeffner, Dave Cetti, and Luke Hendrix diagnosed the problem and appointed an interim pastor to help lead this church through transition.

Under the leadership and guidance of Intentional Transitional Pastor Mark Belokonny and of Mark Hoeffner, the leadership of Grace realized the church exists in, "...an extremely diverse population; diverse in age, ethnicity, income, and culture. ...one of the most un-churched areas in the United States."⁸ The elders committed to come together under the gospel of Jesus Christ "...in order to create unity from diversity in the love of Christ which will be a beacon for all to see."⁹ The church was seemingly heading in the right direction under Belokonny, but his position was temporary (2004-2006).

When Grace was ready to hire a new senior pastor, they picked a man not recommended by CBNorthwest. This new pastor emphasized the attractional-events and program-driven model, increasing the busyness of volunteer workers, and creating a

5. Mark Belokonny, *Profile Grace Church: In Fellowship with Conservative Baptists* (Seattle, WA: Grace, 2004), 4.

6. Martha-Mary, *Profile Grace Church: In Fellowship with Conservative Baptists* (Seattle, WA: Grace Church, 1994), 1.

7. Alex Jech, *April 2003, 50 Years of Grace: looking back / looking forward* (Seattle, WA: Grace Church, 2003), 3-4.

8. Belokonny, *Profile Grace Church*, 3.

9. Belokonny, *Profile Grace Church*, 3.

stressful work environment for the staff. He lasted three years as he disqualified himself by infidelity. The church was crushed and again at a crossroads. This is where I came into the picture; Mark Hoeffner had been grooming me for a position like this, to transition a church to effectively make disciples who make disciples. My goal in becoming a new senior pastor was in line with the CBNorthwest vision statement:

We envision a covenant community of churches committed to the glory of God, centered on the gospel, changing our communities by being doctrinally sound, missionally driven, and culturally sensitive – which includes culturally appropriate evangelism, leaders mentoring the next generation of leaders, and churches planting churches through Great Commandment love, Great Commission purpose, and Great Confession dependency.¹⁰

By “missionally driven” CBNorthwest means, “Guided or controlled and pushed to live a life that reflects the mission Christ has given to His Church: to make disciples.”¹¹ I believe in this vision, which I have seen lived out at Imago Dei in Portland, Oregon led by Rick McKinley and at Soma Communities in Tacoma, Washington formerly led by Jeff Vanderstelt. While I was unemployed (July 2009 to January 2010), I volunteered at Imago Dei as a receptionist, soaking up whatever I could glean from McKinley and new Executive Pastor Luke Hendrix (who previously worked for CBNorthwest as director of Church Next). Meanwhile, I traveled with Hoeffner twice a month shadowing him as he led a church in White Salmon, Washington through the “Recontextualization Process.” This was invaluable as it prepared me for ministry in Seattle.

Through the candidacy process for the senior pastor position at Grace Church Seattle I was aware of the recent history since the 1980s, but I did not have my finger on the pulse of this church concerning their hesitancy to fulfill their vision. Prior to interviews I had spoken with a few former pastors, the chairman of the elders, and Hoeffner to discern if the leadership was united and humble, willing to learn and move forward to shepherd the congregation as a team. The leadership had come together, but they

10. Bruce Ware and Gerry Breshears, ed., *CB Northwest Identity Document* (Portland, OR: CBNorthwest, 2006), 7.

11. Ware and Breshears, ed., *CB Northwest Identity Document*, 9.

needed a more clear vision, leader development, and the congregation needed modeling from the elders and pastors in how to build Christian community and live missionally.

During my interview with the elders on January 4, 2010, I cast a vision to transition Grace Church from the program and consumer model of ministry to a missional community model. I envisioned each of the elders co-laboring with me as lay pastors (1 Peter 5:1-4) responsible for shepherding small groups of people based on location. I expressed my desire to equip and appoint elders to shepherd groups to function like mini-churches (Acts 2:42-47; cf. Titus 1:5). The elders would need to learn to reproduce themselves in others and develop leaders who share the load of ministry in preparation for growth. To illustrate the model of ministry I was proposing I explained the difference between a spider organization and a starfish organization (see figure 1).

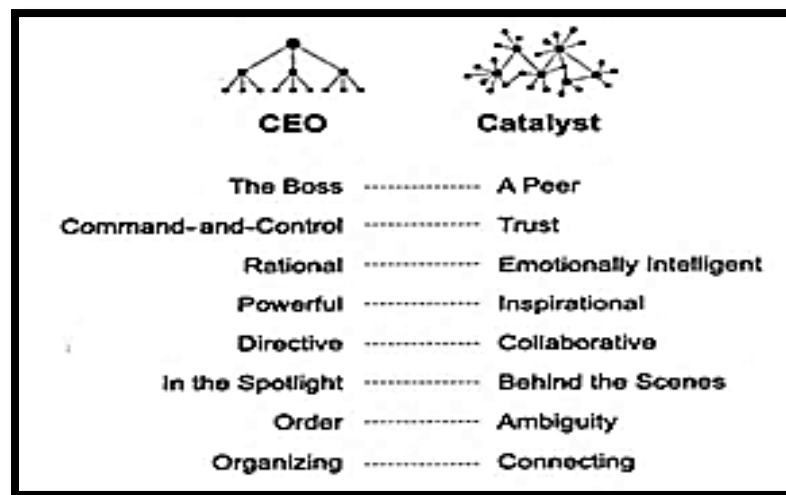


Figure 1. CEO leads spider organizations; Catalyst leads starfish organizations.¹²

A spider organization depends on the CEO for vision, organization, directives, accountability, and the success of the company. Decision making is centralized and thus everyone in the organization is dependent upon decisions from the top. Take away the head of the company and the company suffers until a new CEO is put in place. If the

12. Ori Brafman and Rod A. Bachstrom, *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations* (London, UK: Penguin Group, 2006), 130.

new leader is ineffective, the company continues to struggle until it finds effective leadership. If the organization cannot find an effective leader, the company will likely close its doors.¹³ The implication for Grace Church is that after Ed Shaw left, the church spent twenty years trying to replace him.

I explained to the elders how a program-driven church perpetuates a lack of cohesiveness in the disciple-making process as pastors resign, people try to keep the ministry going by maintaining or starting new programs, and then when new pastors are hired they try to re-organize the church but get frustrated trying to bring the various programs together (like fitting puzzle pieces together from different puzzles). Thus “silo” ministries develop and compete with one another for volunteers and resources, often making it difficult to make disciples one-on-one or in small groups.

Starfish organizations are more relational with shared leadership responsibility based on leaders being discipled to make disciples who make disciples. In this kind of organization, success is not dependent on any one individual who knows and teaches the Bible from the pulpit or in a classroom. In starfish organizations people are freed from following pre-packaged programming and trained to think for themselves using the Word and their spiritual gifts to serve the body. But this takes work on behalf of the leadership. When this happens, starfish organizations decentralize and multiply like an organism. When the church faces problems it can more easily adapt because individual groups are not dependent on one person who runs the show. Rather, leadership is shared based on principles; there is interdependency between leaders while maintaining autonomy in leading groups. Thus, individual leaders can work through problems in small groups by applying shared leadership values and principles.¹⁴

13. Brafman and Bachstrom, *The Starfish and the Spider*, 129-131.

14. Brafman and Bachstrom, *The Starfish and the Spider*, 31-53.

Having led youth and college ministry for eleven years, I have heard time and again that students want to be a part of authentic everyday community on mission with Jesus. As a result these conversations, my vision for Grace was to develop missional Home Communities led by elders and lay leaders shepherding small groups in which everyone is involved in ministry. The elders agreed with the vision and I was presented before the congregation as the senior pastor candidate in late January, 2010.

At every meeting during candidacy week I explained I would take the church through the recontextualization process (much like what Mark Hoeffner had taught me at the church in White Salmon, Washington). For the church to be healthy, both spiritually and relationally it would need to be biblical in orthodoxy and orthopraxy (sound doctrine and biblical relationships). I explained the leadership needed to continually ask the right questions: What is? What ought to be? What needs to stay? What needs to go? What needs to change? And finally I explained I would work with the elders and staff to develop vision, values, and a mission statement as a filter for how to “program” or structure Grace Church to make disciples (see figure 2).

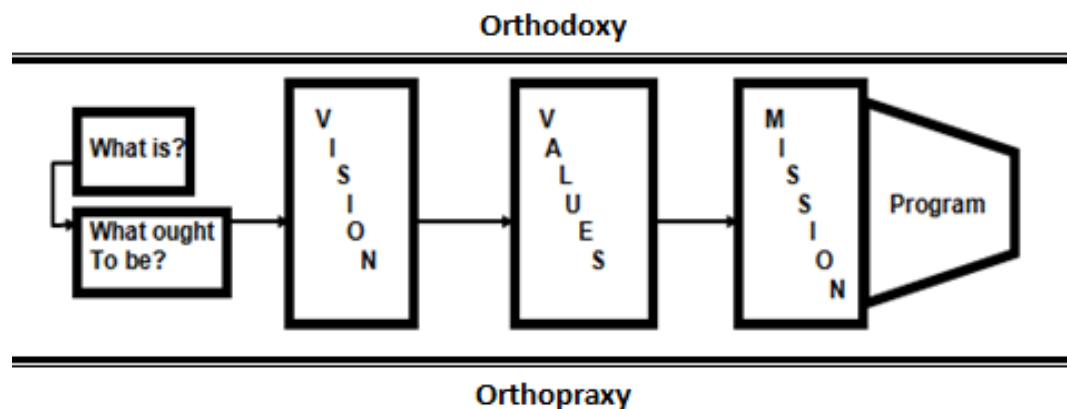


Figure 2. Recontextualization of a Church.¹⁵

15. Ideas for chart from Mark Hoeffner, "Recontextualization of a Church" (Seminar, CBNorthwest Enrichment Conference, Bend, OR., March 11, 2008).

Working through recontextualization is a continual process that is never-ending because culture and people are continually changing, but there are some things that remain constant, such as orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Grace Church is baptistic and reformed in theology with an elder-led, congregationally-affirmed polity.¹⁶ I agreed with the basic structure of this church (hence why I accepted the position), but it was evident in my first few weeks as senior pastor that there were too many programs meant to attract people (like attracting “customers” to consume a product) and not enough disciplined leaders to effectively lead these ministries. Thus the congregation was uninspired and overburdened with busyness.

The Problems Leadership Attempted to Solve in 2010-2012

In the first few months of my tenure at Grace Church the Chairman of the elders (we will call him Paul as he is like a mentor to me) asked me to develop a vision checklist with long-term, mid-term, short-term, and immediate goals. For the long-term I listed goals such as: conversion growth and not transfer growth; multiple church plants by raising up leadership from within; Grace reflecting the diversity of Seattle within a five mile radius of our facility; and partnering with other churches to impact businesses, schools, and the community. For the mid-term I listed goals such as: grow to the capacity of our facility by conversion growth (with current seating this would be about five hundred); raise up leaders from within; work toward our first church plant; and elders leading missional Home Communities and/or mentoring leaders of groups that are reaching people in the community and which become a testing ground to discern who might be an effective church planter. In the short-term I listed the goals of: shoring up staffing related to worship and children’s ministry; conducting Elder Training; and starting missional Home Communities by the fall of 2015. My immediate goals were to work with

16. *Grace Church By-Laws* (Seattle, WA: Grace Church, adopted May 18, 2008), 4-5, 10-11.

the elders to develop: the Vision, Values, and Mission statements to guide the re-contextualization process; Ministry Equip / Leadership Training for all leaders and helpers in ministry at Grace; and develop right relationships in covenant community.¹⁷

The problems I discovered in implementing these goals were three-fold. First, there was an environment of mistrust. Second, there was a lack of leadership development for key leaders in how to carry out their ministry responsibilities. Third, there was a lack of purpose for each ministry in how to work together. Thus my focus in the first three years was to solve these problems to set the stage for potentially transitioning to what I call the missional Home Community (cell) model of ministry.

An Environment of Mistrust

To solve the problem of mistrust between the elders and staff, my first priority was to bring them together in relational contexts. If the elders and staff could not work together as a team, how could we expect the rest of the church to develop unity? For the entire church I emphasized reconciliation between those with broken relationships. Between the staff and elders we needed to be the first to hold ourselves accountable to the Matthew 18 process of going to your brother or sister one-on-one to resolve issues. We worked together to model this for our church and hold congregants accountable to the same. I developed a “Biblical Reconciliation” chart based on Hoeffner’s lectures and drawings on a white board at a Relational Elder Seminar (I believe his content came from *True Faced*¹⁸). This chart has been used regularly at Grace to resolve conflict in our community (see figure 3, page 13).

17. *Ryan’s vision step 1* (Seattle, WA: Grace Church, 2010), author of this paper.

18. Bill Thrall, Bruce McNicol, and John Lynch, *True Faced: trust God and others with who you really are* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2004), 22-34 and 120-127.

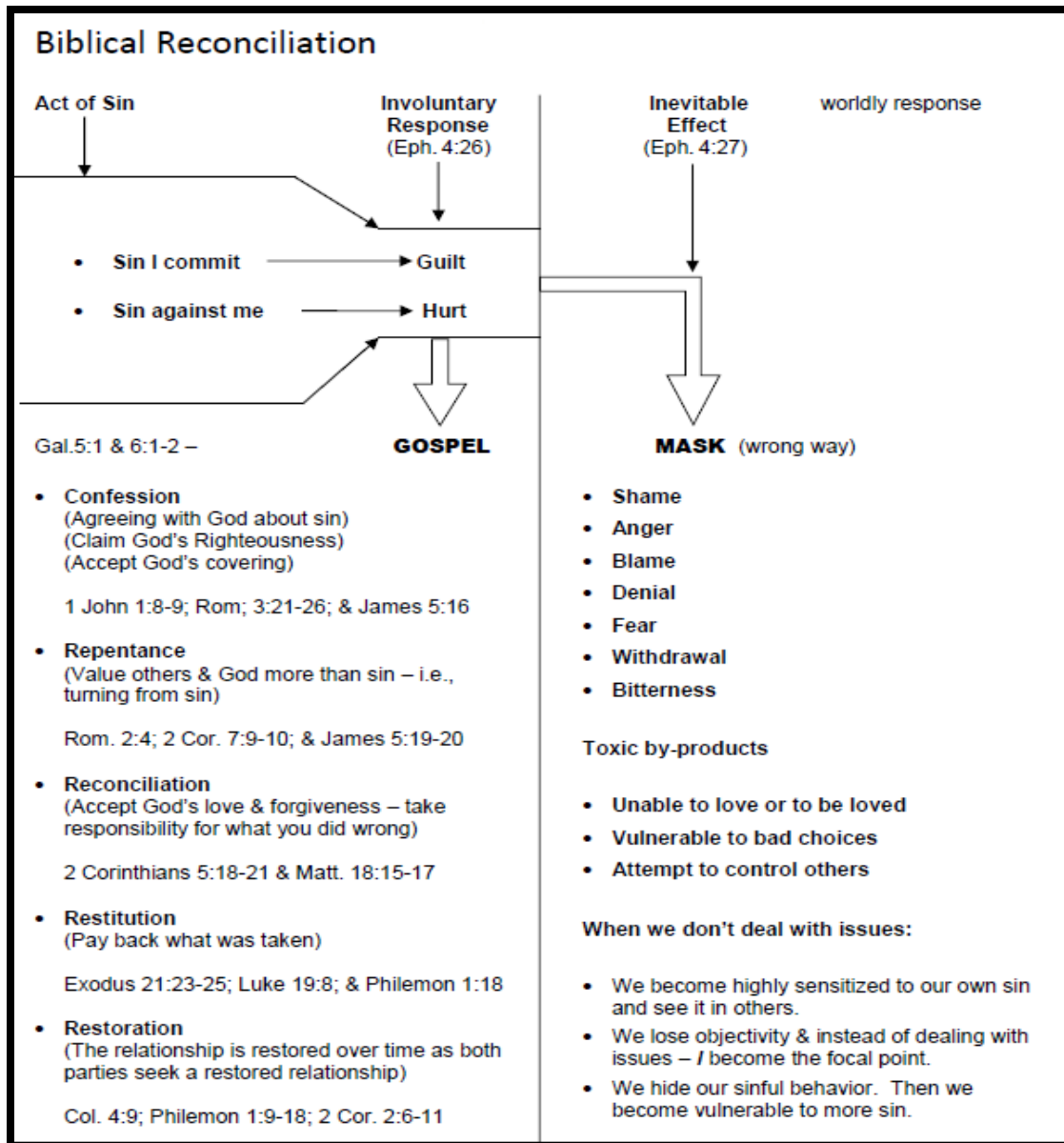


Figure 3. Biblical Reconciliation Chart.¹⁹

This chart illustrates that when a sin happens, there is an involuntary response of guilt or hurt between all parties affected. If these issues are ignored or go unresolved, toxic by-products of unresolved sin begins to develop, which makes the problems worse contributing to the development of an environment of mistrust. When all parties involved

19. Ideas for chart from Mark Hoeffner, "CBNorthwest Relational Elder Training" (seminar, Grace Church, White Salmon, WA., 15 November 2009); see also Thrall, McNicol, and Lynch, *True Faced*, 22-34 and 120-127.

choose to work through the issues biblically by confessing, repenting, reconciling, and paying back restitution, it is then the relationship can be restored. By practicing the principles of Scripture found in this chart we developed an environment of trust.

Lack of Leader Development

In my first year of ministry at Grace I attended every ministry program we offered. I spent individual time with each head of each ministry to listen to them, shepherd them, and give feedback by asking “What is? What ought to be?” I observed there were many leaders who were not trained for their role in ministry. In talking with the heads of programs I began to see there was an unhealthy pattern in how ministers, teachers, and helpers were selected and trained. To summarize, often a person would be asked to help lead a ministry without being screened concerning their character and/or without being trained properly to do their particular job. Many small group leaders or children’s Sunday school teachers were recruited not because they desired to lead or because they were gifted for the position, but rather because no one else would step in to fill the job. And thus many of the volunteers were frustrated for lack of training or because they were working outside their spiritual gifting, and thus the quality of our programs suffered. The following is a case study to illustrate my point.

Because of a lack of standards and training for leadership in Sunday school and Children’s Church, the youth pastor at the time (whom I will call James son of Zebedee), he and I developed an abuse policy, a volunteer application, a background questionnaire, and background consent form, which was put into effect during the summer of 2010 in preparation for fall ministry of that same year. The elders made it policy that all volunteers and those working with minors comply with these minimum standards until we would hire a Children’s Education (CE) Pastor who would re-write the policies and conduct leader training. Before hiring this new pastor, our elders were

undecided as to whether to continue to be an attractional-events and program-driven church or embrace the vision to transition to the missional Home Community (cell) model. As a compromise the elders decided to develop a hybrid of the two and so we hired a program-driven CE Pastor with thirty years' experience.

The new children's pastor (whom we will call Peter because he is fun and steady as a rock) re-wrote the policy based on a form he used at his previous church.²⁰ Pastor Peter developed a Children's Advisory Team (CAT) consisting of a Sunday school director and advisors, an AWANA director (to resurrect the AWANA program) and AWANA team leaders, a MOPs (Mothers of Pre-schoolers) director and her helpers. The first purpose of this team was to discern what curriculum should be used in Sunday school and Children's Church that would sync together and give children a baseline of biblical knowledge from nursery to fifth grade. Second, the purpose of CAT was to develop training for teachers and helpers. Third, they developed a schedule for CE workers during the worship service so that no volunteer would miss worshipping during the service more than four weeks in a row. Fourth, this team purposed to resurrect the AWANA program. And finally, the CAT had a goal to encourage our leaders and helpers in children's ministry. We have since developed a "successful" program and attractional events-driven children's ministry with over 120 volunteers filling 148 different positions between AWANA, Sunday school, Children's Church, Youth Ministry and MOPs. But has this contributed to transfer growth between churches in the West Seattle area? Were we becoming like Wal-Mart shutting down the smaller churches? Do these many programs build up our church family or create too many activities, thus fracturing family? These are important questions to answer throughout this thesis-project.

20. Pastor Peter, "Policy On Physical or Sexual Abuse, Sexual Harassment Or Other Sexual Misconduct" (paper presented at Grace Church elder meeting, Seattle, WA, February 29, 2012).

Because of a lack of structure and leader training in multiple ministries, including the development of elders and leaders of small groups, MOPs, Grief Share, Wounded Warriors, Children's Ministry, Youth Ministry, Worship Team, Deacons (Resource Advisory Team, Stewardship Team, and Administrative Staff), Men's and Women's ministry, etc., our elders began to develop a leader training program, which has become a requirement for involvement as a leader at our church. In the first year I taught a six week seminar called "Ministry Equip" based on the "Relational Elder Training" I received from Mark Hoeffner²¹ during my period of unemployment as I traveled with him to the church in White Salmon. During "Ministry Equip" I covered basic principles about biblical leadership, communication, reconciliation, and shepherding.

Following the Ministry Equipping sessions I worked primarily with our elders to develop their theology, teaching skills, and shepherding abilities. We read *Elders and Leaders* by Gene Getz and *Spiritual Leadership* by J. Oswald Sanders, and we invited Hoeffner to lead a "Relational Elder Training Seminar" in August, 2010. On September 12, 2010 I preached a sermon to kick-off the fall entitled "Why we do what we do and you" in which I cast a vision for elders teaching School of Theology (SofTh) classes on Sunday mornings as a primary method of leader development. I also began to cast the vision for missional Home Community (HC) groups being our main method of shepherding people to care for one another and evangelize their neighborhoods. Four of our elders participated in teaching SofTh, and five of our elders were involved in HC groups from the start (though these five doubled up and were in three groups). In the first year, three of our elders discerned they were not called or gifted to be elders, and they resigned with dignity. Since our *By-Laws* required a minimum of six elders to serve on the board, the elders sought to fill the void without much training. I was reluctant to

21. Mark Hoeffner, "Relational Elder Training – session 1-7" (lectures, Grace Baptist Church, White Salmon, WA, September 20, October 4, 18, November 1, 15, 29, and December 13, 2009).

place new elders on our board who were not equipped or qualified, so I proposed changes to the *By-Laws* to allow for less than six elders assuming we were intentionally training new elders to one day fill the role.²² Thus I worked with the remaining four elders to develop our “Elder in Training Program,” which would take about a year to complete and to properly vet potential elders. We interviewed three candidates, two of which became Elders in Training (EITs) starting June of 2011. To make sure it was fair to incoming EITs, all the elders went through the process.

The requirements to become an elder through this process were developed by the elders and written by a former elder whom I will call Andrew (because he is an important figure at Grace who does behind the scenes work). The requirements include: meeting the character expectations of an elder (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9);²³ attend elder meetings and fulfill elder responsibilities assigned; write out and share one’s testimony to the elders; read *25 Basic Bible Studies* by Francis Schaeffer and write a doctrinal statement based on each chapter (one per week), to be read and examined by fellow elders during an elder meeting; write out and share with fellow elders why the individual wants to be an elder; after completing the requirements and having been observed for six months to a year, proving one’s character, the EIT would be affirmed by the elders with the final step to be affirmed and officially commission the elder candidate before the congregation on a Sunday during worship.²⁴ The elder requirements have set the standard for orthodoxy and orthopraxy for leaders of Grace and by June 2012 our congregation affirmed seven elders as having completed this process.

In working with the elders we discerned in January 2011 that our church continued to have the problem of ministries not working together and teachers needing

22. “Grace Church By-Laws, Article II. Leadership. Section 1. Board of Elders. C. Composition” (revision presented to Grace Church members, Seattle, WA, June 12, 2011), 3.

23. All references to Scripture are in the *English Standard Version* (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

24. Andrew, “Elder in Training Requirements – final R3” (letter presented to potential elders of Grace Church, Seattle, WA, March 17, 2011).

to learn basic doctrine. And so we established a *Membership Covenant* in line with our *Constitution* and *By-Laws*, which express our Vision, Values, and Mission. We held a “Ministry Equip” seminar on March 20, 2011, to teach the content of the covenant to our leaders and to prepare our congregation for this covenant being incorporated into our *By-Laws* at our annual meeting.²⁵ The covenant explains what it means to be in covenant community, it covers doctrine, the leadership’s obligation to Grace Church members, and a member’s obligation to the church. During the annual meeting on June 12, 2011, the elders shared a PowerPoint presentation to remind the people of the “Recontextualization” process, and to explain that the *Membership Covenant* represents the side-boards of orthodoxy and orthopraxy with the expectation that all members be in agreement with and live out the biblical principles of the covenant. We also unveiled our Mission Statement during this meeting: “**GRACE CHURCH** exists to **LOVE** God & people, **PROCLAIM** Christ, **BUILD** community, **EQUIP** the saints, **MULTIPLY** ministers, and missionally **SEND** out followers of Christ to be the Church wherever we are.”²⁶

During the annual meeting we explained our vision and values were in process of being developed, and that once completed, the Vision, Values, and Mission Statements would be used as a filter for decision making concerning changes to our programs and the structure of our church. We expressed our desire for every ministry to get on board with our Mission Statement like a fleet of ships heading in the same direction. We also announced that we would resurrect the AWANA program beginning September 2011. This was well received and from 2011 to 2012 it produced good fruit, ministering to approximately 70-100 students per year ranging in age from four to eleven. According to church records compiled by our Community Life Director (whom I will call Priscilla), 17

25. “Grace Church Bylaws: Attachment A, Membership Covenant” (revision presented to Grace Church members, Seattle, WA, June 12, 2011), 12-15.

26. “Annual Meeting: Grace Church” (power point presentation, slide 2, presented to the members of Grace Church, Seattle, WA, June 12, 2011), developed by author.

students have accepted Christ and continued discipleship through this program (mostly children who are “churched,” and have grown up in Christian homes).²⁷ Also, the Sunday worship service increased by an average of 51 congregants for September 2011 compared to the previous September and our numbers have been consistently above 250 in attendance since we made this change.²⁸ I believe this growth is directly related to developing a quality children’s program. But the questions remain: does this program exist to minister to Christians from a variety of churches in our community, resulting in transfer growth? Is Grace reaching “unchurched” families? And finally, is this methodology the most effective approach to discipleship and outreach for children? These are hard questions every church leadership team needs to honestly evaluate.

Another dimension Pastor Peter brought to our church was expertise in helping people discover their spiritual gifts. He taught a few classes on the subject using the *S.H.A.P.E.* material by Erik Rees. Following up these classes he conducted interviews with several members to plug them into the right ministry that fits their gifting. But again, we have approached this from a program-driven perspective. Is there a better way to discover and use spiritual gifts in the cell-group church?

I continued to hold SofTh classes for discipleship of HC leaders using *Jesus Driven Ministry* by Ajith Fernando and *Spiritual Leadership* by J. Oswald Sanders. I met with the elders, staff, and individual HC leaders to further develop their skills in leading groups. But I was not seeing change happening in HCs. The elders were growing, but the HCs were still operating as bible studies. The people were not inspired to break up their affinity groups to become multigenerational, based on location and missional teams to reach their neighbors. Plus the programs continued as they always had, as silo ministries disconnected from and competing with one another. The staff began to

27. Priscilla, *Assimilation Chart: 2010-Present* (Seattle, WA: Grace Church, 2014), 1-4.

28. *Attendance Tracking fiscal years 2010-2015* (Seattle, WA: Grace Church, 2014), statistics recorded by volunteers and Priscilla, compiled by author.

observe burnout by the Easter of 2012, which I now realize was the direct result of trying to do a hybrid of the program-driven and cell models of ministry. We needed a cohesive system that would pull everyone together as we were headed toward a fork in the road.

A Lack of Direction

To solve the problem of ministries not working together the Grace church elders further developed our filter to be presented at the next annual business meeting. We reminded the church we had developed a *Membership Covenant* as our baseline for orthodoxy and orthopraxy. We reminded congregants of our Mission. Then we shared the Values developed by the elders, which were inspired by Francis Schaeffer's essay *Two Contents, Two Realities*.²⁹ In short we value: "teaching *Sound Doctrine*; engaging people with *Honest Answers to Honest Questions* (authenticity); experiencing *True Spirituality*; developing Christ-centered *Community*; experiencing a *Multigenerational* congregation; and developing an environment for *Enriching Families*."³⁰ Following the presentation, I read a quote from Francis Schaeffer's essay, stating the first century church was "...really struggling for a practicing community. ...that reached down all the way to their care for each other in their material needs."³¹ Schaeffer was describing a church I envisioned we could become. But how could we live this out in community? Because the concept of cell-ministry had not been fully developed in my mind and because our elders and pastors didn't fully comprehend what we were focusing on or where we were headed, we unenthusiastically shared our values and vaguely communicated a foggy vision. We didn't know what to focus on and it showed.

29. Schaeffer, *25 Basic Bible Studies*, 143.

30. "Values_June 2012" (power point presentation, slide 4, presented to the members of Grace Church, Seattle, WA, June 24, 2012), developed by author.

31. Schaeffer, *25 Basic Bible Studies*, 140.

The elders were trying to discern if we should continue to equally emphasize all ministries or narrow the focus. Pastor Peter explained at his former church they had “core” and “support” ministries. The “core” ministries were led by the staff and elders while the “support” ministries were led by lay leaders. This would allow other ministries to exist so long as they would support and feed into the “core.” The elders discerned the “core” ministries of staff’s focus should be on Sundays, Wednesdays, and HCs and that all ministries needed to work together by fall 2014.³² But in making this decision, we still lacked a unified vision between the “core” and the “support” ministries. Were we a program-driven ministry or a missional Home Community model? These ministries were not working together, and so we asked why we were we doing what we were doing.

For refinement of our vision the elders wanted to develop a statement that was short and to the point similar to Microsoft’s, “A computer on every desk and in every home.”³³ We came up with “Building Christ-centered families in Community.”³⁴ While this was our official statement, this did not capture the vision to transition to missional Home Communities. Hence we found ourselves stuck as a church with a hybrid of a spider organization (programs, events, consumer-driven) and a starfish organization (strategic, missional, and community oriented). I began to lose sight of my original vision becoming discouraged during the holidays in 2012. I realized we needed outside help, hence the reason I looked into various Doctorate of Ministry (DMin) programs.

Rekindling my Original Vision and Focus in 2013

As I read the description of Outreach and Discipleship track at Gordon-Conwell, my heart began to flutter as my passion for the missional Home Community vision was

32. Doubting Thomas, *Minutes Elder Meeting 2012_0627* (Seattle, WA: Grace Church, June 27, 2012).

33. Steve Ballmer, “Speech Transcript – CeBIT 2002 Press Conference,” Microsoft, speech in Hannover, Germany, March 13, 2002, accessed August 3, 2015, <http://news.microsoft.com/2002/03/13/steve-ballmer-speech-transcript-cebit-2002-press-conference/>.

34. Matthew Levi, *Grace Church Elder Board Meeting Minutes* (Seattle, WA; Grace Church, August 22, 2012).

rekindled. I shared with Paul (elder Vice Chairman at the time) that I was discouraged that our elders were not on board with my vision. I explained that in casting a vision to recontextualize our church from an events and program-driven model to a missional Home Community model I felt alone, as if I were rolling a boulder up a hill while people stood by watching, scratching their heads. I appealed to him to get behind the vision by helping me roll the boulder to gain some momentum so that eventually it would be rolling down the hill on the other side. I asked him to verbally support what I was trying to accomplish during elder meetings and support my pursuit of a Doctorate of Ministry (DMin) with a focus to learn how to bring about this kind of transition. He committed to supporting these efforts. I reminded Paul that he had asked me to write a vision paper for the elders with long-term, mid-term, short-term, and immediate goals (which I cited earlier). We celebrated the fact most of the immediate and short-term goals had been accomplished. I posited it was time to start working on the mid-term goal of every elder leading a missional Home Community, shepherding the people to missionally reach out to their friends and neighbors, and that this would become our primary ministry outside of Sunday worship and AWANA / youth ministry on Wednesday evenings.

To lead the way, I had raised up a co-leader in my HC (who eventually became an elder in 2015) and asked him to take the reins of our group while I would start a new group with a missional focus. Starting January 2013, I brought together six of my unchurched friends with seven fringe people who attended Grace. I updated the elders on the progress as this would become a model for future HC groups. Meanwhile our church staff was in process figuring out which support ministries should stay, which ones needed to change, and which ones should go. We concluded School of Theology needed to become more purposeful by supporting leader development. Grief Share and MOPs did not need to change, but the leadership needed to attend our fall School of Theology class on leader development. Women's ministry needed to sync together with

men's ministry and Home Communities so that they would not compete with one another. Wounded Warriors and Celebrate Recovery (CR) needed to be concluded because of unwillingness of the leaders to work with our staff to develop a discipleship process for those ministries. Though these were difficult conversations, we were becoming more purposeful to begin the transition and form a new identity.

The Struggle to Convince the Elders to Transition in 2013-2014

In the spring of 2013 I shared my concern with the elders that our Home Community groups were not functioning as envisioned during my interview and candidacy. We only had seven groups, four of which were led by leaders who did not excel in shepherding or spiritual oversight. Only two groups, beside my own, had elders involved, and one of those groups was being led by two elders. Three of our elders were not involved in a Home Community at that time.³⁵ Six of the seven groups were inward focused and had become stagnant in disciple-making and therefore lacked desire for outreach. These groups were shrinking instead of multiplying. I had repeatedly recast and shared the vision for the elders being the lay pastors of the church who would co-labor with me to shepherd small groups of people based on location rather than based on affinity. The goals were for each elder to shepherd a group to missionally reach out to their neighborhoods and for each elder to apprentice a co-leader to learn to lead his own group within a few years. The vision was met with resistance as the elders considered their schedules and as they struggled to understand this methodology. But the elders supported my pursuit of a Doctor of Ministry degree to learn how to disciple our leaders to figure out how to lead this church in line with my vision.

During my time at Gordon-Conwell in June 2013, the elders had a meeting led by Paul. I don't know what was said, but coming out of this meeting every elder committed

35, Mary Martha, ed., *Grace Church Philosophy of Ministry Booklet: Covenant Community – Spring 2013* (Seattle, WA: Grace Church, 2013), 20-21.

to leading their own HC. That summer I had difficult conversations with those not gifted in leading or shepherding groups and either invited them to become an apprentice of an elder to co-lead an HC or to re-direct them to serve the body in another capacity. For the first time in fall 2013, all groups were led by an elder or pastor with intent of making disciples of non-elders and pastors who would eventually lead their own groups. This made it easier to disciple our leaders to lead in that I had weekly meetings with the staff on Tuesdays and with the elders on Sundays, so that we could go through discipleship material at the same pace. I led these meetings using the Socratic method to show, by example, how they could lead discussions during their own HC meetings.

During this twelve month period, our elders began to realize the method of ministry I had been proposing was revolutionary. As one elder (whom I will call Thomas because of his skepticism of this “new” methodology) stated during an elder and pastor meeting at Paul’s home, “Ryan, you’re talking about turning our church upside down.” Later he said to me privately, “Don’t take this wrong, I believe God is sovereign and brought you here for a purpose, but if we had known this was what you wanted to do, we wouldn’t have hired you.” I didn’t take this personally because I know Thomas cares about me, but this method of ministry was mind-blowing to him. It goes against the DNA and mindset of ministry for those raised or trained in the programmatic model.

During this season, many questions were brought up by our elders such as: how do we develop our Home Community leaders to do more than just lead a bible study? How do we disciple and equip the people to shepherd one another? If MOPs, AWANA, Grief Share, and women’s ministry are so successful, then why not just develop an equally successful men’s ministry? Do we need to eliminate ministries that compete with Home Communities? How do we do men’s and women’s ministry in the Home Community context? How do we do children’s ministry in this system?

In the first three years at Grace our leadership had developed an effective women's and children's ministry. The elders were asking if we made this transition, would we destroy what we had built and blow up the church. A couple of our elders just could not see how this would work. Another elder (whom I will call Barnabas because he is an encourager to me) was locking horns with Paul, my mentor, over commitment and methodology of ministry. To me it felt like each of these elders was about to resign and go opposite directions (just like we read about in Acts 15:39-40). But Barnabas came around, and in the summer of 2014 he said something to the effect that the reason he struggled to embrace the cell-model is because he saw that women's ministry was going very well and he wanted to have the same type of ministry for men. But then as he thought about it he realized if we developed the same ministry for men he would seldom see his wife or children because they would each have separate ministries on separate evenings with the potential of dividing households. And so he realized the beauty of the cell-model is it brings families together. Since June 2014, both Paul and Barnabas have become strong advocates for recontextualizing church, and in 2016 they became our elder Chair- and Vice Chair-man, respectively, to help lead the transition.

Research Questions

Francis Schaeffer describes a beautiful and biblical first century community in *Two Contents, Two Realities*; what will it take to actualize this kind of community in 21st century North American churches? Is attractional-events and programs the best methodology in North America to reach the consumer-culture and make disciple-makers? Does this methodology hinder the development of authentic biblical community such as described in the *Book of Acts*? Or are these type of churches spinning their wheels and catering to the consumer-culture by misplacing the time, energy, spiritual gifts, and resources of the people who compose the body of Christ? Is the cell-driven

and missional community model a viable and effective template for disciple-making?

How does a church do children's and youth ministry in a cell-driven church?

Thesis Statement

In my thesis-project I plan to answer the question: How does a pastor help facilitate the transition from an established attractional-events and program-driven model to become a missional and cell-driven church? I will use the recontextualization process as the basis for continuing to refine our model to become missional and to discern if a pure cell-group church or a hybrid of the cell and select programs is what is best to make disciples in the Puget Sound, consumer-driven culture. But first, I will explore the biblical basis for the cell-driven and missional Home Community model in chapter two.

In chapter three, I will look at various examples of missional home groups and the cell-driven model in church history to gain ideas about how to do cell-ministry in North America. I will read contemporary authors to glean wisdom about how to disciple leaders of a local church to implement the missional Home Community and cell-driven model in today's Western context. In chapter four I will sharpen the focus and interview pastors who have successfully coached and/or facilitated a church-wide transition from the attractional-events and program-driven model to the missional community and cell-driven methodology. The goal is to figure out a metrics of success for developing multigenerational, mixed-gender groups, and to determine how to do youth and children's ministry in such a context. In chapter five, I will evaluate what Steve Timmis, Joel Comiskey, Dan Braga, and Jeff Vanderstelt have to say about this kind of recontextualization. I will listen to these interviews with the Grace Church elders and pastors, and based on our discussions we will determine if our church should completely transition to a pure cell-driven model without a mid-week children's and youth program, or if this is untenable and if there is a more effective and efficient alternative.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction: Biblical Disciple-Making

Jesus did not come into the world to reach the world by Himself: rather, as E.M. Bounds stated, “men are God’s method.”¹ The LORD could have come in all His glory to establish His Kingdom in full from the start; instead, God incarnated Himself in Jesus as the “exegesis” (explanation) of God to humanity,² culminating in Jesus’ suffering on the cross as a ransom that some might partake in His kingdom through faith (John 1:1-18; cf. Philippians 2:5-11; Revelation 20:11-15). Thus God sent His Son on a mission to redeem humanity, and to make disciple-makers who would reach and disciple the world in preparation for the reign of the coming King (Matthew 4:19; cf. John 17:18; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1-2). As Steve Timmis and Tim Chester put it, “The Triune God is a missionary God. The church, then, has a mission because God has a mission. The role of the church is to participate in the mission of God.”³ If a local church (such as Grace Church) is striving to be a Christ-centered family on mission together as a community, then it must understand Jesus’ Commission and Jesus’ method of making disciples.

In this chapter I will exegete parallel passages of the Great Commission in the Gospels and Acts by defining key terms related to evangelism and discipleship, which can be used as a theological reference for the remainder of this thesis. I will show revival was intertwined with the success of the Great Commission in Acts 1 and 2. Finally I will make a case for cell-group structure based on Acts 2:42-47, showing what it could look like to make disciples in the tradition of the Apostles of Jesus in today’s Western culture.

1. Quoted in Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Spire, 1993), 109.

2. D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 135.

3. Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping around Gospel and Community* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 105.

The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20

Wayne Grudem said the Great Commission is, “The final commands of Jesus to the disciples...”⁴ After the events of the Passion Week (Jesus’ Triumphal Entry, teaching in the Temple, Last Supper, Judas’ betrayal, Jesus’ trial and crucifixion under Pontus Pilate, and resurrection) Jesus appeared to many of His disciples as evidence He was raised by God from the dead and to give additional instructions concerning evangelism and discipleship. On one such occasion He was with His disciples in Matthew 28,

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” [English Standard Version]

Craig Blomberg teaches that the Commission brings “us to the climax and conclusion of Matthew. Jesus is passing the torch to his disciples...”⁵ Verse 18 is a clear allusion to the Son of Man (the Messiah) receiving delegated authority from the Ancient of Days (Yahweh, as depicted in Daniel 7:13-14).⁶ With authority from God the Father, Jesus commanded His disciples to go and make disciples (v. 19). The word “go” is a participle, which in the Greek is similar to “baptizing” (v. 19) or “teaching” (v. 20). Thus it could be translated “going” or “as you go” make disciples.⁷ Additionally it is a circumstantial participle, where “going” takes the emphasis of the main verb “make disciples,” which is an imperative. Thus Jesus was commanding His followers to continuously make disciples as they “go” about their daily lives amongst the people from every nation (ethnic group) using the method Jesus had taught them.⁸

4. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 1243.

5. Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture, vol. 22 (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1992), 431.

6. Blomberg, *Matthew*, 431.

7. D.A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 595.

8. Cleon Rogers Jr., and Cleon Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), s.v. “πορευεῖσθαι,” Matthew 28:7 and 19, 65-66.

Disciple-Making in Jesus' Method Traced in the New Testament

To understand what it means to make disciple-makers one must understand the various words used for “disciple” or “to make disciples.” The verb *matheteuo*, used in Matthew 28:19, conveys the idea of a teacher calling a pupil to take on Jesus’ “yoke” of instructions (11:29) by submitting to His words as authoritative.⁹ Think of oxen yoked together to plow a field; this was a metaphor used of the discipline in discipleship as a learner would figuratively attach oneself to a rabbi in a discipleship relationship. For the disciples of Jesus this meant they would learn from Jesus and literally follow Jesus and learn by listening, by observation and by doing what the master had taught them. For the Christian today, this figuratively means one would attach oneself to Christ and His revelation imparted to us in the Gospels, Acts, Epistles and Revelation.¹⁰

A cognate of *matheteuo* often used in the Gospels is *manthano* (to disciple). The definition goes beyond learning or mental assent to adopt a set of doctrines. Socrates held when someone is learning it should “penetrate deeply into the nature of everything (including his own nature).”¹¹ In Greco-Roman culture *mathetes* (a disciple) would bind oneself to a master to gain practical or theoretical knowledge as, “an apprentice of a trade, a student of medicine, or a member of a philosophical school.”¹²

In the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible) *mathetes* translates *talmid*, a disciple who had studied under a Jewish scholar called a *hakam*. In Hebrew culture only a *hakam* had authority to teach his own interpretations of the written *Torah* (the Pentateuch) and the oral Torah (the traditions of the fathers including the Mishnah, Midrash, etc.). Only a disciple who had studied under a *hakam* for an extensive period

9. Carson, “Matthew,” in *EBC*, vol. 8, 595-596.

10. Carson, “Matthew,” in *EBC*, vol. 8, 278.

11. D. Müller, s.v. “manthano,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 483.

12. Müller, s.v. “manthano,” in *NIDNTT*, vol. 1, 484.

could take on this role and develop his own school.¹³ Eventually this led to formation of the synagogue (a gathering place) for education and worship outside Jerusalem.

Outside of Temple worship in Jerusalem, the common person focused on their own spiritual formation (Deuteronomy 6:4-6) and then discipleship of their own children by talking about the Law and how it relates to everyday life (6:7-9).¹⁴ To enhance discipleship already taking place in the home, rabbis (teachers) were educated and synagogues were formed for worship and teaching. Starting a synagogue required only ten Jewish men to gather for theological training. Synagogue schools developed for elementary school aged children to learn from a rabbi how to read, write, and study the Hebrew Bible.¹⁵ Since teaching was considered authoritative, a training process was developed for accreditation and ordination.¹⁶ Following a synagogue school education, those desiring to become a disciple of a rabbi would apply for discipleship. If accepted, one would “attach” himself to his rabbi in a pupil-teacher relationship to learn the rabbi’s “yoke” of instructions and way of life. This was personalized education, and so a rabbi could only take on a few students at a time.¹⁷ After years of learning the rabbi would accredit his disciple before the local Sanhedrin (assembly of elders), who would examine and ordain the apprentice as a rabbi with authority to teach, judge, and make decisions as an elder on questions raised by a local Jewish community.¹⁸

In the New Testament, the verb *manthano* – “to disciple” – occurs twenty-five times, six of which are in the Gospels. The noun *mathetes* – “a disciple” – occurs 264 times in the New Testament, exclusively in the Gospels and Acts “to indicate total

13. Müller, s.v. “manthano,” in *NIDNTT*, vol. 1, 485-486.

14. Brian Haynes, *SHIFT: What it takes to finally reach families today* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2009), 33-36.

15. J.I. Packer, and M.C. Tenny, ed. *Illustrated Manners and Customs of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1980), 502-503.

16. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life And Times Of Jesus The Messiah: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 737.

17. Dennis McCallum and Jessica Lowery, *Organic Discipleship: Mentoring Others Into Spiritual Maturity and Leadership* (Columbus, OH: New Paradigm, 2012), 3-4.

18. Edersheim, *The Life And Times Of Jesus The Messiah*, 737.

attachment to someone in discipleship.”¹⁹ This is the historical backdrop of the Gospels, the culture within which Jesus and His disciples were raised, and gives a better understanding of Jesus’ command to go make disciples.

Another important word in the New Testament, used synonymously with *manthano*, is the verb *akoloutheo*, applied by a rabbi to call a disciple “to follow” in a master-pupil relationship. The word was not used metaphorically and had a “semi-literal sense of ‘going behind’ ...with reference to the earthly Jesus.”²⁰ It is synonymous with “come after me” (*opiso mou*), and is the simplest call to discipleship in Matthew 4:19 and Mark 1:17.²¹ Disciples were called to follow Jesus by accepting “the renunciatory lot of wandering about with him.”²² In the Gospels, the expectation of those called was to the “decisive and intimate discipleship of the earthly Jesus.”²³ A potential disciple had to make a quick decision; hence Peter, Andrew, James and John immediately responded by dropping their nets and leaving their boats to follow Jesus to learn to become “fishers of men” (Luke 5:11; cf., Matthew 4:20, 22; Mark 1:18, 20). Disciples were expected to give up their old life and take up the new calling, which was not worth it to some (e.g., the rich young man, cf. Mark 10:21-22).

Jesus’ method of disciple-making was similar yet distinct from the method used in Rabbinical Judaism. Jesus was not the head of a synagogue, and we have no record of His training or accreditation by a rabbi (nor of His ordination by a local Sanhedrin), hence Jesus’ authority was questioned (Matthew 21:23).²⁴ Although He taught in local synagogues (e.g., Luke 4:14-44) and was called “rabbi” by His disciples and those Jesus came in contact with (e.g., Mark 9:5; 10:51; John 1:38), His method was not primarily to

19. Müller, s.v. “manthano,” in *NIDNTT*, vol. 1, 486.

20. C. Blendinger, s.v. “akoloutheo,” in *NIDNTT*, vol. 1, 482.

21. W. Bauder, s.v. “opiso,” in *NIDNTT*, vol. 1, 493.

22. Müller, s.v. “manthano,” in *NIDNTT*, vol. 1, 488.

23. Blendinger, s.v. “akoloutheo,” in *NIDNTT*, vol. 1, 482.

24. Edersheim, *The Life And Times Of Jesus The Messiah*, 738.

teach in a building. Jesus didn't wait for volunteers to come to Him (as did the rabbis of the day); rather, He sought disciples and called them with divine authority (cf. Mark 1:16-20).²⁵ He amassed a following through His public ministry to the crowds in Galilee, but the emphasis of His discipleship was in everyday community with His disciples as they walked along the way, doing ministry together (e.g., Mark 10:17-44; cf. Deut. 6:4-9).

Jesus had many disciples He trained and sent out to preach (e.g., the seventy-two; cf. Luke 10:1-20). But Jesus' chief concern was to make disciple-makers of the Twelve whom He would commission as Apostles (Mark 3:13-19; cf. Matthew 10:1-4). Within the Twelve He had a special relationship with an inner circle of three: Peter, James, and John (e.g., Luke 9:28-36).²⁶ Jesus worked together with His disciples to minister to the people (e.g., John 6:1-59), but His focus was not on teaching the crowds or even in meeting their needs; rather, He used these experiences to teach His closest followers deeper discipleship lessons and to test their resolve to follow Him (e.g., John 6:60-71). His discipleship methods were personalized – intent on reproducing Himself in a few – like a seminary education while on a three and one half year mission trip.

Distinctive to the Apostles was a special authority conferred on them from Jesus to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth (Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:8). And the teaching of the Apostles was considered authoritative (Acts 2:42), eventually written down as the Gospels, Acts, Epistles and Revelation so that the disciple-making process would continue beyond the lives of the Twelve (cf. Ephesians 4:11-12; 1 Timothy 4:16; Titus 1:5-9; Hebrews 13:7, 17; 1 Peter 2:9). We learn from reading the Gospels that to be a disciple of Jesus was an eschatological calling (Mark 1:15), for Jesus' vision of disciple-making went beyond the lives of His earthly followers "to the future dawn of the Kingdom

25. Blending, s.v. "akoloutheo," in *NIDNTT*, vol. 1, 482.

26. McCallum and Lowery, *Organic Discipleship*, 4.

of God (Lk. 9:59 f.).”²⁷ The evangelistic offer to be part of God’s Kingdom was meant to go beyond Israel as the one “chosen” nation to unite Jew and Gentile under one Lord and Savior to make a new people who reach out to all nations (ethnic groups) to the ends of the earth (Matthew 24:14; 28:19; Acts 1:8; Ephesians 2:11-22; Revelation 5:9).²⁸

The Great Commission is both a local and global missionary enterprise meant to include active participation of future disciples devoted to the teachings of Jesus (Acts 2:42; 9:26-31). But as will be seen in the following paragraphs, disciples have been known by various titles. What follows is important because I often hear Christians in twenty-first century America use such words as “disciple” or “Christian” without understanding the gravity of their title and calling in light of the biblical definition. Therefore, I often hear pushback from Christians who only attend Sunday services or avoid Christian community because they assume a faith commitment is all Jesus expects of His followers. As will be seen, the truth is Jesus expects a Christian to become a disciple and live in Christian community under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, engaged in outreach and discipleship.

In Acts 9, several words are used to identify those who were in Christian community. They were called disciples (9:2), saints (9:13), and brothers (9:17, 30).²⁹ They were also known as people “belonging to the Way” (Acts 9:2). The way (*ho hodos* in Greek) refers to a mode of life.³⁰ In secular Greek this alluded to religious salvation by following the way of a leader, the way of truth, or the way of knowledge. In the Septuagint, *ex-hodos* (Exodus) literally meant to follow the way of Yahweh leading His people out of Egypt by His grace into to the Promised Land. Following the way of Yahweh included adherence to His Commands and the way of His saving activity. The

27. Blending, s.v. “akoloutheo,” in *NIDNTT*, vol. 1, 482.

28. Blomberg, *Matthew*, 431.

29. Richard N. Longenecker, “Acts,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 370.

30. Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, *NLEKGT*, s.v. “ὁδός,” Acts 9:2, 248.

door of their sanctuary was the way to come to know God. And the way of man, evil, and darkness is contrasted with the way of God, goodness, and light.³¹

Ajith Fernando says, “The designation ‘the Way’...was probably applied to the church by the Christians themselves. [And]...probably indicated they viewed themselves as following the true way in the larger Jewish community.”³² For the disciples in Acts, this was missionary language to emphasize: (1) following Jesus as the way to salvation; (2) preaching the gospel of Jesus as the way to salvation; and (3) participating in the church as a community under the Lordship of Jesus Christ that follows His teachings.³³ This is important because it shows how serious disciples were about living in the way of Jesus together in community. Think of the implication for discipleship today.

Later in Acts, the disciples in Antioch are first called “Christians” by outsiders as a kind of derisive reference against those always talking about Christ.³⁴ The Greek *Christianoi* (Christian) was similar to *Augustiano*i (partisans of Nero), meaning Christians were “those belonging to, identified with, or adherents or followers of Christ.”³⁵ The ending of *Christianoi* suggests the distinction of these people was not based on ethnicity, but rather their religious loyalties.³⁶ To be a Christian was to be of “the household of Christ,” a community (in Antioch) that included both Jews and Gentiles.³⁷ Therefore the makeup of the group called “Christians” was social and religious but not ethnic, fulfilling the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19).³⁸ Thus the emphasis was for the church to live by a moral creed, but Christians were not to divide over race and non-moral issues.

31. G. Ebel, s.v. “hodos,” in *NIDNTT*, vol. 3, 935-939.

32. Ajith Fernando, *Acts*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 295-296.

33. Ebel, s.v. “hodos,” in *NIDNTT*, Vol. 3, 940-942.

34. F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts, Revised*, The New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 228.

35. Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 371.

36. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 371.

37. Longenecker, “Acts,” in *EBC*, vol. 9, 402.

38. Blomberg, *Matthew*, 431.

In the New Testament the verb *didasko* (to teach) is used with reference to making disciples (e.g., Matthew 28:19-20; Ephesians 4:20-21; 2 Timothy 3:14, 16).³⁹ The basis Grudem gives for studying systematic theology is Jesus' command to go make disciples, baptizing them in the name of our Triune God, and teaching them to observe what Jesus taught them. In the narrow sense this "teaching" would simply be the oral commands of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels. In the broader sense this includes His lifestyle and teachings alluded to in the four Gospels (e.g., Luke 24:44-48; John 14:25-26; 16:12-13; 20:30; 21:25). These teachings and values go beyond the Gospels to include a proper understanding of the Old Testament, prophecy, and Jesus' commands to be lived out in the community of disciples called the church. Many of these teachings are recorded by the disciples of Jesus in the New Testament. These writings were guided by the Holy Spirit to give instruction to Christians as disciples of Jesus (cf., John 16:12-13; Acts 1:8; 2:42; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:16-21).⁴⁰ "The task of fulfilling the Great Commission," Grudem states, "includes therefore not only evangelism but also *teaching*. And the task of teaching all that Jesus commanded us is, in a broad sense, the task of teaching what the whole Bible says to us today."⁴¹

In Ephesians 4:20-24 Paul reminds Christians that a disciples' understanding of the teachings of Jesus "is revealed in one's conduct."⁴² Thus Paul used *mimēomai* (to mimic, imitate or follow) to convey discipleship.⁴³ He urged the Corinthian church to imitate (*mimētes*)⁴⁴ him (1 Corinthians 4:16), and explained this was the reason he sent Timothy to Corinth, to remind the church of Paul's teachings of the ways of Christ (4:17). Paul humbly recognized he too was a disciple in 11:1 when he said, "Be imitators of me,

39. Müller, s.v. "manthano," in *NIDNTT*, vol. 1, 486.

40. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 27.

41. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 27.

42. Müller, s.v. "manthano," in *NIDNTT*, vol. 1, 486.

43. W. Bauder, s.v. "mimēomai," in *NIDNTT*, vol. 1, 490.

44. Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, *NLEKGNT*, s.v., "μιμητης," 1 Cor. 5:16, 356.

as I am of Christ.” This is a call for disciples to follow a disciple-maker. And this is the call of members of a local church, to imitate their leaders (Hebrews 13:7); for the role of leadership in the local church is to equip the saints to do ministry so that the body might build itself up in love (Ephesians 4:11-16). Thus there are character and competency standards for leaders in the local church (1 Timothy 3:1-13; 4:16; 5:20-22; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-5), as well standards of conduct for congregants toward leadership (1 Timothy 5:17-19; Hebrews 13:17). This does not, however, mean leadership will be perfect, nor that a lay person needs to attain a certain level of Christlikeness before being involved in making disciples. For even the Apostle Paul confessed imperfection (Philippians 3:12) before calling disciples to imitate him.⁴⁵ The ultimate goal is not legalistic righteousness, but rather, “laying hold of Christ in the consciousness of one’s own imperfection and letting one’s life be continually re-moulded by Christ in obedience to him (cf. 3 Jn. 11).”⁴⁶

In summary, disciple-making is not simply the teaching (*didasko*) of Christian values; rather it is an intimate call for Christians to adhere to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in community, and to go make disciples (*manthano*) of Jesus. The New Testament uses several words to convey this concept, giving clues of how Jesus modeled disciple-making for those He commissioned to do likewise. Jesus started the disciple-making process with the disciples (*mathetes*) by literally calling them to come after Him (*opiso mou*), to follow (*akoloutheo*) Jesus and learn to become fishers of men and women. Jesus ministered to the crowds; He called, trained, and sent out the 72 to proclaim the gospel; but He focused on a small group of 12, investing heavily in leader development of few to carry the mantle after His ascension. These disciples developed a community known as the people of “the way” (*ho hodos*), “saints,” “brothers and sisters,” or more commonly today, “Christians” (*Christianoī*). The disciples passed on Christ’s teachings

45. Bauder, s.v. “mimeomai,” in *NIDNTT*, vol. 1, 491.

46. Bauder, s.v. “mimeomai,” in *NIDNTT*, vol. 1, 491.

and exhorted each other to imitate (*mimetes*) Jesus with eternity in view. From the Scriptures one learns Jesus was a disciple-maker who taught a reproducible process of disciple-making, which He expected Christians to emulate until His return.

The Great Commission in Mark 16:15-16

The ending of Mark is controversial in that the conclusion is not found in the earliest manuscripts,⁴⁷ but a majority of manuscripts contain 16:9-20.⁴⁸ Therefore it is worth looking at a few words pertinent to the discussion of evangelism and discipleship in verse 15 in which Jesus said, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.” Looking at the context (16:16), the result of this preaching is either the salvation or condemnation of individuals based on their response to the gospel. This leads to learning about evangelism and defining the gospel.

Evangelism and the Gospel of Jesus According to the Scriptures

Anglican scholar N.T. Wright says the gospel is understood by Protestants and Evangelicals as, “a description of how people get saved; of the theological mechanism whereby... Christ takes our sin and we his righteousness; in other people’s language, Jesus becomes my personal savior; ...I admit my sin, believe that he died for me, and commit my life to him.”⁴⁹ I believe these statements to be theologically sound as they describe what the Bible teaches concerning a response to hearing the gospel, but this is not necessarily how the term *euangelion* (the gospel) was used historically or biblically.⁵⁰

47. William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 592.

48. Barbara Aland, ed., Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, *The Greek New Testament: Fourth Revised Edition* (Stuttgart, DEU: Biblia-Druck, 1998), cf., note on vv. 16:14-15, 191.

49. N.T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Saul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 41.

50. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 41.

In Mark's version of the Great Commission, *euangelion* means "good news." From the Hellenist period (323-30 B.C.)⁵¹ to the time of the New Testament, *euangelizesthai* was used in context of "announcing good news" such as heralding a long-awaited release from captivity, or "the announcement of a great victory, or to the birth, or accession, of an emperor."⁵² The one preaching was called *euangelistes* or *euangelos* (an evangelist, a messenger, or an angel) commissioned by his ruler or on behalf of the State to make a political "good news" or "gospel" announcement.⁵³

The usage of *euangelion* in secular Greek gives insight into how it is used in the New Testament. For example, the angel of the Lord announced "good news" of the birth of the Savior, Christ the Lord (Luke 2:10-11). Jesus declared an essential purpose of His ministry was to preach "good news" to the poor and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, involving a release from captivity and liberty to the oppressed (Luke 4:18-19; cf. Isaiah 61:1-2a). Jesus proclaimed (i.e., preached) the "good news" of the kingdom in synagogues and to the crowds from town to town, healing as He went, which validated His message (Luke 4:38-44; Matthew 4:17-25). The leadership of Israel understood this as the proclamation of the coming of Messiah to re-establish the Davidic Monarchy (2 Samuel 7:12). Rome would have perceived this as a threat to the stability of the region.

Jesus was received by many as the potential Messiah when He came to Jerusalem gentle and riding a donkey; however, He was rejected as such when He was betrayed, tried, crucified, and buried on the charge of being "King of the Jews" and rival to Caesar (Luke 19:28-23:56; cf. John 19:12-16; 1 Corinthians 1:23). But God raised Jesus from the dead, which Christians believed to be "good news" because, "in his cross, the decisive victory has been won over all the powers of evil, including sin and

51. David N. Sedley, s.v. "Hellenistic philosophy," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy: Second Edition* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 373.

52. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 42-43.

53. U. Becker, s.v. "euangelion," in *NIDNTT*, vol. 2, 107.

death.”⁵⁴ Thus, for the Christian *since* Jesus was raised, Jesus *is* Lord (1 Corinthians 15:12-28; cf. Colossians 1:3, 15-20) and therefore Caesar *is not*. “Ultimately, for the Roman point of view, there was only one Lord of the world. According to Paul, he now had a rival.”⁵⁵ The proclamation “Caesar is Lord” was gospel for the Empire. Romans were expected to hail him as Lord and entrust themselves to him as savior, protector, and emperor.⁵⁶ It is precisely because Christians preached the gospel (*euangelion*) of Jesus Christ as Lord that Christians were perceived as a threat to be eliminated.⁵⁷

The verb *kerysso* means “to preach” with reference to the gospel of Jesus in Mark 16:15. This is the proclamation of the “good news” of Jesus leading to salvation (16:16). The verb is an imperative, and thus preaching was expected of the Apostles.⁵⁸ Similarly the *kerygma* described “the content of a proclamation” that was to be made by a herald or preacher called a *keryx*,⁵⁹ used synonymously with *euangelistes*.⁶⁰ In the New Testament, the *kerygma* of the gospel of Jesus Christ was the “good news” proclamation leading to the salvation of the hearers based on faith (Romans 10:14-17; 16:25; cf. Acts 2:16-40).⁶¹ Peter outlines three basic elements of the *kerygma* of the gospel of Jesus Christ in his sermon in Acts 2, “(1) A historical proclamation of the...death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus, set forth as the fulfillment of prophecy and involving man’s responsibility; (2) a theological evaluation of the person of Jesus as both Lord and Christ; (3) a summons to believe and receive the forgiveness of sins.”⁶²

Strictly speaking, the *kerygma* of the gospel is a message about the redemptive work of God in human history. To preach (*euangelion*) the gospel (*kerygma*) is to give

54. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 60.

55. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 56.

56. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 57.

57. Craig Keener, *Revelation*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 35-39.

58. Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, *NLEKGNT*, s.v. “κηρυξατε,” Mark 16:15, 104.

59. L. Coenen, s.v. “kerysso,” in *NIDNTT*, vol. 3, 48.

60. Becker, s.v. “euangelion,” in *NIDNTT*, vol. 2, 107.

61. Coenen, s.v. “kerysso,” in *NIDNTT*, vol. 3, 52-54.

62. Robert H. Mounce, “Gospel,” in *EBDT*, 474. Quoted in Ajith Fernando, *Acts*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 101.

narrative proclamation “Jesus Christ is Lord,” which when received by faith results in salvation.⁶³ Hence, the Great Commission in Mark is to proclaim the gospel, which leads to salvation (Mark 16:15-16; cf., Acts 16:31), what Evangelicals call evangelism. When combined with the Commission in Matthew, it becomes clear that proclamation of the gospel of Jesus is to go beyond sharing the message to involve disciple-making (Matthew 28:19-20). Thus evangelism and discipleship are two sides of the same coin.

The Great Commission of Luke in 24:48-49 and Acts 1:8

As noted, the *kerygma* of the gospel of Jesus includes the fulfillment of prophecy and an invitation to a theological evaluation and acceptance of the person and work of Jesus as Christ, Savior and Lord. Jesus essentially walked through the prophecy of the *kerygma* of the gospel of Messiah fulfilled in Jesus in Luke 24:44-47. Then He declared that the gospel would be proclaimed to all nations beginning in Jerusalem, and then commissioned His disciples by saying in 24:48, “You are witnesses of these things.” Jesus repeats these words in Acts 1:8, “But...you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” I will address the promise of “power from on high” (Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:8) in the section on revival. For now I will focus on a key word related to evangelism, what it means to be a witness of the gospel.

Witnessing as Evangelism in the Gospels and Acts

Each version of the Great Commission mentioned thus far affirms that it is a global mission (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; and Acts 1:8). In Matthew, Jesus focused on the concept of disciple-making and teaching. In Mark and Luke, the ministry of the gospel involves preaching the *kerygma* of the gospel of Jesus and the

63. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 45.

proclamation of forgiveness of sins (Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47).⁶⁴ What is unique to Luke and Acts is the reference to disciples being *martys* (witnesses).

The term *martys* means to be “a witness” in classical Greek, the Septuagint, and the New Testament. The noun *martyria* describes active appearance as a witness, while *martyrion* refers “more to the content of the statement...or to a piece of evidence.”⁶⁵ Similarly the verb *martyromai* means “to call someone as a witness” and *martyreo* means “to bear witness,” “to give testimony,” or “to confirm something to someone’s advantage.”⁶⁶ In the Septuagint these terms are used primarily for legal testimony, commemoration, or to testify to the reading of a covenant.⁶⁷ The idea of suffering by bearing witness of faith to the point of death was held in high esteem in Judaism (e.g., 4 Maccabees 18:11). However, the actual term *martys* was not used to describe martyrdom in Judaism, but rather developed as such in early church history.⁶⁸

In the New Testament the first time *martys* is used for a witness with reference to Jesus is in Luke 24:48. For Luke, the Apostles and disciples were commissioned by Jesus to proclaim the message of the kingdom as witnesses to Jesus as Lord and Messiah (Acts 1:2-8). More precisely, those with apostolic authority needed to have walked with Jesus from His baptism to His ascension, having been a witness of His death and resurrection (Acts 1:21-22; cf. 2:32; 3:15; 13:31; 26:16). From this point forward, Luke no longer uses the term “witness for witnesses of facts, but specifically for the witnesses of the risen Lord, who by this very qualification are authorized and legitimated as his witnesses among the nations.”⁶⁹ To be a witness in Acts was to proclaim, sometimes with urgent wooing, the *kerygma* of the gospel of Jesus Christ

64. Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, *NLEKGNT*, s.v. “κηρυχθῆναι,” Luke 24:47, 174.

65. L. Coenen, s.v. “martyria,” in *NIDNTT*, vol. 3, 1038.

66. Coenen, s.v. “martyria,” in *NIDNTT*, vol. 3, 1038.

67. Coenen, s.v. “martyria,” in *NIDNTT*, vol. 3, 1040-1042.

68. Coenen, s.v. “martyria,” in *NIDNTT*, vol. 3, 1042.

69. Coenen, s.v. “martyria,” in *NIDNTT*, vol. 3, 1044.

(Acts 4:20; 8:25; 18:5; 20:24; 28:23). To do so would imply Caesar is not Lord, which was risky, and thus the way of a witness of the gospel was the way of rejection and suffering. A key example is the first martyrdom in Christian history of Stephen at the hands of Saul, who himself would become converted and become a witness of the gospel of Jesus (Acts 6:8-8:3; 22:20-21; cf. 9:1-31; 11:19-26).⁷⁰

While martyrdom often involves being killed for holding to the testimony of Jesus, the concept does not always involve death.⁷¹ The Apostle John was considered a living martyr for his witness of the *kerygma* of the gospel of Jesus (Revelation 1:9). And Jesus exhorts Christians in Smyrna to remain faithful even to the point of death, implying that they may not die for their testimony (2:10). But often a witness would be killed for their faith as seen in the example of Antipas in Pergamum (2:13) or Perpetua, a twenty-two-year-old nursing mother taken to the arena along with four other Christians in 202 A.D.⁷²

To be a witness, as an Apostle, was to be a witness of the gospel of Jesus. To be a witness for Jesus, today, is to bear witness to the Apostles' testimony and to one's Christian experience of the regenerating work of the gospel.⁷³ And this requires supernatural help; therefore, I will look at the promise by Jesus to empower disciplers with the Holy Spirit to do His will (cf., Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:4-8, 8). But first I will take a look at what one can learn from Jesus' Commission in the Gospel of John.

The Great Commission in John 20:21-23

On the evening following the resurrection, Jesus appeared to ten of His Apostles at supper proving His resurrection and to commission them to do ministry. He showed them His hands and feet and said in John 20:21-23, "Peace be with you. As the Father

70. Coenen, s.v. "martyria," in *NIDNTT*, vol. 3, 1044.

71. Coenen, s.v. "martyria," in *NIDNTT*, vol. 3, 1047.

72. Rodney Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity: How The Jesus Movement Became the World's Largest Religion* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2011), 140.

73. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 622.

has sent me, even so I am sending you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.’”

A key word relevant to the Great Commission is “sent” (John 20:21), which is a cognate of “apostle” or “sent one.”⁷⁴ Just as Jesus was “sent” from heaven on a mission to make disciples and prepare for the coming Kingdom, so also Jesus was sending His disciples to continue His work. They were to be imitators of their Lord. Thus there is a link between His mission and theirs.⁷⁵ This does not mean the disciples were simply replacing Jesus, rather that Christ’s mission would continue through them.⁷⁶ In Matthew, Jesus commissioned His disciples to make disciples of all ethnic groups. In Mark, Jesus commissioned His followers to proclaim the gospel. In Luke and Acts, Jesus said His Apostles would be eye-witnesses to the *kerygma*. In John, Jesus sent the Apostles on mission into this world. In each of the Gospels there is an emphasis of outreach and discipleship, to explicitly continue what Jesus had started. And in Acts is the capstone that the witness of the gospel of Jesus would be passed on from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Thus, there is a link between what Jesus did with His disciples and what the Christians are called to, from generation to generation, until Jesus returns.

The Work of the Holy Spirit and the Great Commission

It seems there are two workings of the Spirit relevant to the discussion of the Great Commission. The first is that the Spirit empowers the testimony of a preacher to pierce the heart of a hearer so that one is led to repentance and regeneration (e.g., Acts 2:37; 17:34; cf. John 3:3-8; Titus 3:4-7). The second is supernatural occurrences in

74. D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar NT Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 648.

75. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John, Revised*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 746-747.

76. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 649.

special circumstances that manifest as signs and wonders in the physical realm (Acts 2:1-8; cf. 10:34-11:18).⁷⁷ In John 20:22, Jesus breathes on the Apostles to receive the Spirit. In Luke 24:49 the Apostles are promised to be “clothed with power from on high.” In Acts 1:8 Jesus declares that the Apostles will be baptized with the Spirit enabling them to be witnesses of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Do these passages describe the same event? Or different occurrences that lead to the same outcome?

In the Gospel of John, Jesus prepared His disciples for His departure between the Last Supper and His arrest at Gethsemane (John 14-17). He declared the Spirit would be given to them by the Father and that the Spirit would guide the disciples, empowering them to bear witness to Jesus’ name (John 15:26-27; cf., 14:16-17).⁷⁸ In John 20:22 it appears this was partially fulfilled on the evening following the resurrection. Don Carson observes that the reception of the Spirit (John 20:22) is linked with the power to forgive sins (20:23). Not that forgiveness rests in human hands; rather, it seems Jesus is passing the torch of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in relation to declaring the gospel. Note that the Apostles received the Spirit, and then they were informed their testimony to the gospel would be efficacious unto salvation and forgiveness of sins.⁷⁹ If this passage is linked with Luke 24:45, this would show the supernatural work of Jesus and the Spirit to make known the *kerygma* of the gospel in relation to fulfilled prophecy.

What did Jesus mean in Luke 24:49 when He said the disciples would receive “the promise of my Father” and be “clothed with power from on high”? Darrell Bock believes Jesus described the promise of the Father to equip disciples with the Spirit to testify to the *kerygma* more effectively.⁸⁰ Joel Green notes, “It is the Holy Spirit who will

77. Fernando, *Acts*, 338-339.

78. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 648.

79. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 656.

80. Bock, *Luke*, 621.

empower them for their role as witnesses.”⁸¹ It is the role of the witnesses to testify to Jesus as Messiah and to the supernatural in-breaking of the kingdom of God,⁸² requiring Holy Spirit affirmation to legitimize their witness, and leading to the dawning of the age of the Spirit.⁸³ This is similar to the Commission in John 20:22-23 with the slight difference of Jesus pointing His disciples to a future event in Luke 24:49 (cf. Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-41).

In Acts 1:4 (as in Luke 24:49), Jesus instructed His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father. Jesus clarified what He meant when He reminded His disciples of the prophecy of John the Baptist concerning the Messiah: that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5; cf. John 1:32-34). *Baptizo* means to dip or to immerse in water, but it can take different meanings depending on context. In Acts 1:5, Jesus emphasized the Apostles would experience a spiritual baptism when they receive “power” or “filling” when the Holy Spirit would come upon them (1:8; cf. Luke 24:49).⁸⁴

In the Old Testament, being filled by the Spirit of God was a distinguishing mark of the anointing of a prophet.⁸⁵ In the New Testament, to be filled with the Spirit denotes “endowment by the Spirit which is pictured in a rather physical and visual manner...”⁸⁶ At Pentecost, the Spirit’s power enabled the disciples to preach the gospel in languages unknown to the speaker, but recognizable by the hearer to legitimize the *kerygma* of the gospel and persuade witnesses of Pentecost that this was fulfillment of prophecy (Acts 2:1-41; cf. Joel 2:28-32; Jeremiah 31:31-34).⁸⁷ There are examples of the filling of the Spirit in Scripture that do not mention tongues, thus it is unnecessary to insist tongues must occur with this filling (e.g., Acts 4:8; 9:17; 13:9; Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 12:3-11).⁸⁸

81. Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 859.

82. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 859.

83. Bock, *Luke*, 621-622.

84. Fernando, *Acts*, 51.

85. R. Schippers, s.v. “*empimplemi*,” in *NIDNTT*, vol. 1, 735

86. Schippers, s.v. “*pimplemi*,” in *NIDNTT*, vol. 1, 735.

87. Fernando, *Acts*, 51, 86-91.

88. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 747.

Regardless of how the Spirit manifests His presence in special circumstances, the point is these are unique occurrences signifying God's work among His people.

The First Revival of the Church in Acts 1 and 2

Revival is the Spirit's quickening of one's spiritual senses that awakens the soul and leads to confession of sin, repentance unto a changed life, and commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ by individuals or by a Christian community that has lasting effects, and which helps to transform culture. This definition covers three interrelated concepts: renewal, revival, and awakening. Timothy Beougher explains spiritual renewal is personal, revival is seen in the church body, and awakening spreads beyond the church into society.⁸⁹ Each of these is evidence God is at work among His people.

The Psalmist appeals to the Lord to "give us life" (Psalm 80:18) and "revive us again" (Psalm 85:6). The word for "life" is the same as "revive" and thus the Psalmist is asking God to cause His people "to wake up and live."⁹⁰ A New Testament word with similar meaning is found in the story of the prodigal son who was once considered dead, but has returned to his father and is described as "alive again" (Luke 15:24).⁹¹ And Robert Coleman likens revival to "the rekindling of a slowly dying fire (2 Tim. 1:6) or to a plant that has put forth fresh shoots and 'flourished again' (Phil. 4:10)."⁹² This describes the heart of a believer being turned back to the Lord in a fresh way.

John the Baptist preached a baptism of repentance to the Nation of Israel in preparation for the coming Messiah. He prophesied in Matthew 3:11 that one would come who would "baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (cf. Acts 1:5). The purpose of

89. Timothy Beougher, "Introduction and Overview to History of Evangelism, Discipleship and Revival" (lecture taught at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, to Doctor of Ministry students, first year residency in Hamilton, MA the 18-21 June 2013).

90. Robert Coleman, "What is Revival?" in *Accounts of a Campus Revival: Wheaton College, 1995*, ed. Timothy Beougher and Lyle Dorsett (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1995), 13.

91. Coleman, "What is Revival?" 14.

92. Coleman, "What is Revival?" 14.

Jesus' ministry was to rekindle Israel's mission to be a nation of priests (1 Peter 1:9; cf. Exodus 19:4-6). Because the Nation of Israel had lost their corporate identity as a missionary people, Jesus came to call to Himself disciples He would train and send out for the purpose of bringing a spiritual awakening throughout Israel and to all the earth.⁹³

Before Pentecost, the speculation of the disciples was that Jesus was about to restore the Kingdom of Israel as in the days of Kings David and Solomon (Acts 1:6). They were expecting the literal and political restoration of their nation.⁹⁴ Jesus answered His disciples saying the kingdom is not confined to a geographical location, but that He was commissioning His disciples to be witnesses to the *kerygma* of King Jesus (a supernatural kingdom) from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.⁹⁵

After the Apostles were commissioned to go and make disciples, they obeyed Jesus' by going back to Jerusalem to wait for the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4, 12). They were in the upper room devoting themselves to prayer in anticipation of a work of the Spirit (1:12-14). This was not a simple prayer meeting for an hour, after which everyone would go their separate ways; rather, the verb "devoting" (1:14) indicates the Apostles had a constant diligence, remaining faithful and steadfast, being devoted to the task of prayer as they waited for the promised Spirit.⁹⁶ The verse also says they were together "with one accord" meaning they had a united and single-minded focus in prayer.⁹⁷ They had experienced personal spiritual renewal and were seeking the Lord, waiting for the Spirit to bring revival and the first spiritual awakening post-resurrection.

When the Spirit came in Acts 2, the text says there was a violent rushing of wind like an echo or the roar of the sea (2:2).⁹⁸ In Hebrew, *ruach* means "wind" or "Spirit"⁹⁹

93. Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Everyday Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 85-88.

94. Fernando, *Acts*, 51-52.

95. Fernando, *Acts*, 52-53.

96. Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, NLEKGNT, s.v. "προσκαρτερεω," Acts 1:14; 2:42, 230, 233.

97. Longenecker, "Acts," in *EBC*, vol. 9, 289.

98. Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, NLEKGNT, s.v. "ηχος," Acts 2:2, 231.

99. Longenecker, "Acts," in *EBC*, vol. 9, 270.

(translated *pneuma* in Greek).¹⁰⁰ At Pentecost the Spirit, like a rushing wind, filled the room and “tongues of fire” appeared and rested on the disciples, filling them with the Spirit to enable them to speak in other languages (Acts 2:3-4). To the modern skeptic this may sound strange, and perhaps it did to the first century reader as well, but this concept was not entirely foreign to them. For it was said fire “rested on Rabbis as they studied or disputed” and a “flame or tongue of fire is depicted on some Roman coins as resting over the head of the person and probably indicates the dawn of a new age...”¹⁰¹ Some might dismiss this as just a story. However, this was written as “an historical event, which, along w. [sic] the atoning death of the Messiah (forgiveness of sins), formed the basis for the New Covenant (s. Jer. 31:31-37; Ezek. 11:19; 36:26-27).”¹⁰²

This event was the beginning of the Church as the Spirit awakened many souls of the Jews to recognize the *kerygma* of the gospel of Jesus as Messiah.¹⁰³ Peter challenged the audience by declaring they were responsible for crucifying the One that God made “both Lord and Christ” (2:36). These titles were ascribed to Jesus after His resurrection precisely because Jesus had accomplished the work of the Christ and was raised from the dead.¹⁰⁴ These were not flippant titles given in memory of His life. For to claim Jesus as Messiah before a Jewish audience required proof, eyewitness testimony that He had fulfilled the hopes of Israel, and that His work was the culmination of God’s redemptive plan. The *kerygma* of the gospel of Jesus that was preached by eyewitnesses was such evidence, validated by His resurrection. Similarly, the title Lord was reserved for Yahweh in Jewish circles, and Caesar in the gentile world. Thus to claim Christ as Lord was blasphemy to the Jew and a threat to the Roman State.¹⁰⁵

100. E. Kamlah, s.v. “pneuma,” in *NIDNTT*, vol. 3, 690.

101. Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, *NLEKGNT*, s.v. “ἐκαθίσεν,” Acts 2:3, 231.

102. Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, *NLEKGNT*, s.v. “ἐκαθίσεν,” Acts 2:3, 231.

103. Fernando, *Acts*, 104.

104. Longenecker, “Acts,” in *EBC*, vol. 9, 280.

105. Longenecker, “Acts,” in *EBC*, vol. 9, 281.

The evidence supporting Jesus as Christ and Lord must have been sufficient because the Jews were “cut to the heart” and asked what they should do (Acts 2:37). Peter responded boldly in verse 38, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” As a result, thousands of Jews who were in Jerusalem for Pentecost repented (had a change of mind)¹⁰⁶ concerning Jesus as Messiah and were baptized (with water as an outward expression of inward change; cf. 2:39-41).¹⁰⁷ The result of this revival in Jerusalem led to a spiritual awakening and the beginning of the fulfillment of the Great Commission of Acts 1:8. This must have brought joy and relief to the hearts of the disciples. And, I am speculating, this created a shepherding problem as the Jerusalem church grew from 120 persons to more than three thousand in one day. How were the Apostles supposed to minister to and make disciples of so many? This created the need for a discipleship structure for accountability, and to sustain continued growth. I imagine there were conversations about how to meet the needs of so many, and I infer from Acts 2:42-47 that the disciples fell back on what they had learned from their master.

The Biblical Case for the Cell-Group Structure in Acts 2:42-47

In my thesis I proposed that the cell-group structure is similar to the method of ministry of Jesus and His Apostles. I have shown that Jesus ministered to the crowds; He called, trained, and sent out the 72 to proclaim the gospel; but He focused on a small group of 12, investing heavily in leader development of a few to carry the mantle after His ascension. In Acts 2:41, the Apostles were presented with the dilemma of making disciples of 3,000 new converts. What follows is the biblical basis of the cell-model.

106. O. Michel, s.v. “pistis,” in *NIDNTT*, vol. 1, 599.

107. Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, *NLEKGT*, s.v. “μετανοησατε,” and “βαπτισθητω,” Acts 2:38, 233.

In Acts there are six blocks of material called “panels” that summarize the activities and the state of the Church from Pentecost to Paul’s imprisonment in Rome. Three of these panels narrate the Church’s mission to the Jewish world (Acts 2:42-12:24). The first panel begins with a summary passage in Acts 2:42-47, concluding a summary statement in 6:7. In between is a series of vignettes to illustrate the summary passage, which is headed by a thesis statement (2:42).¹⁰⁸ The purpose of these summary paragraphs is they “tend to share a common theme about the nature of the interior life of the early church, seen at its best.”¹⁰⁹ And so 2:42-47 covers the first few years of the Church in Jerusalem describing their actions and basic method of ministry.

Exegesis of the Thesis Statement, Acts 2:42

Acts 2:42 states, “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” As mentioned the word “devotion” means, “...a steadfast and singleminded [sic] fidelity to a certain course of action.”¹¹⁰ Additionally, it means: (1) to stick by or be close at hand, attach oneself to, or to be faithful to someone; or (2) to persist in something, to busy oneself with, be busily engaged in, or persevere in an activity.¹¹¹ To add emphasis, this verb in 2:42 is a present active participle, meaning the three thousand new converts were actively and continuously being diligent in their devotion¹¹² to four things: the apostles’ teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers.

First, they devoted themselves to the *Apostles’ teaching*, but what did this refer to immediately following Pentecost? Luke was referring to the Apostles literally teaching

108. Longenecker, “Acts,” in *EBC*, vol. 9, 288-289.

109. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 159.

110. Longenecker, “Acts,” in *EBC*, vol. 9, 289.

111. Fredrick William Danker, Gen. Ed. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd Edition. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 881.

112. Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, *NLEKNT*, s.v. “προσκαρτερεω,” Acts 1:14 and 2:42, 233-234.

Christians assembled at the Temple in Jerusalem (Acts 2:46; cf. 3:12-4:4; 5:21; 6:4).¹¹³

Teaching had a conserving role of establishing doctrine and passing on a body of material considered authoritative because it was proclaimed by accredited Apostles.¹¹⁴

This body of material included: explanations of the nature of salvation, teachings on baptism, the commands of Christ, features of the Christian life, and the message of King Jesus and His Kingdom both spiritually and eschatologically.¹¹⁵ In the New Testament are summarized versions of this body of material in forms of *kerygma*, doxology, or creedal statements used in teaching or worship (e.g., Acts 7:1-53; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:15-20). The Apostles' teaching was also thought of in terms of "tradition" (belief and practice) that could be taught and passed on to others¹¹⁶ (cf. Acts 20:35; 1 Corinthians 11:2; 15:3-8; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6). This provided stability, giving early Christians orthodoxy and "reason for being."¹¹⁷ Around these teachings the first disciples developed an apostolic fellowship (Church), which passed on tradition through discipleship and writings of the New Testament.¹¹⁸

Second, they devoted themselves to the *fellowship*. In the book of Acts, the word *koinonia* (fellowship) is found only here in 2:42, though the concept was commonly practiced and described in other terms. *Koinonia* means "participation in" or "sharing in common of" something with someone else.¹¹⁹ In 2:42-47 it references eating and praying, sharing in devotion to the apostles' teaching through study and practice, sharing in religious experiences such as worship or the work of the Holy Spirit in a community, and the sharing of material goods as any had need.¹²⁰ Thus, the English "fellowship" is not a helpful translation because (in my experience) modern Christians often think this

113. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 161.

114. Longenecker, "Acts," in *EBC*, vol. 9, 289.

115. Fernando, *Acts*, 120.

116. Rex A. Koivsto, *One Lord, One Faith* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 125.

117. Longenecker, "Acts," in *EBC*, vol. 9, 289.

118. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 73.

119. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 160.

120. I. Howard Marshall. *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 83.

simply means friendship or socializing. Although these are elements of *koinonia*, they are more the result of rather than the basis for any kind of sharing.¹²¹ The term is used 18 times in the New Testament and each time it has the connotation of a unique sharing Christians have with God and other Christians.¹²² Acts 2:42-47 implies Christian sharing (*koinonia*) was externally recognizable, which created an attractive community that was distinguished from the larger Jewish community.¹²³

Third, early Christians devoted themselves to *breaking bread* as part of their local apostolic fellowship. In the religious climate of the day was a concept known as table fellowship (only those of the same religion could share the common meal because they would invoke the name of a deity to signify the group's bond of fellowship).¹²⁴ Thus "breaking bread" may reference the technical expression of Jews pronouncing a blessing before the practice of table fellowship.¹²⁵ Therefore, Luke may have been describing a common meal shared by Christians or a primitive form of communion. Fernando states,

Others maintain that this phrase in Acts refers to the daily fellowship meals, which were separate from the continuation of the Last Supper... These meals are said to have developed into the Agape (or love feast) and only later were they incorporated with the Last Supper to become the Lord's Supper (see 1 Cor. 11:20-21).¹²⁶

While "breaking of bread" may have a wide range of meaning, it is interesting the rest of the activities mentioned in Acts 2:42 are spiritual in nature.¹²⁷ Therefore I conclude this was likely the common meal, with the added emphasis of communion to invoke the name of Jesus as the reason for their table fellowship.¹²⁸

Finally, the early Christians devoted themselves to *prayer* as part of their fellowship. The end of Acts 2:42 literally can be translated, "and to the prayers" referring

121. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 160.

122. Fernando, *Acts*, 120.

123. Longenecker, "Acts," in *EBC*, vol. 9, 289.

124. B. Klappert, s.v. "deipon," in *NIDNTT*, vol. 2, 520-521.

125. Fernando, *Acts*, 121.

126. Fernando, *Acts*, 121.

127. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 73.

128. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 160-161.

to set prayers founded in Old Testament teachings to be practiced by the Jews of the first century.¹²⁹ As F.F. Bruce said, “The community’s prayers would follow Jewish models, but their content would be enriched because of the Christ-event.”¹³⁰ The early Christians thought of themselves as Jewish, practicing their faith in a Jewish form,¹³¹ but with Christian content. One can see this influence in *Didache* (a late first century Christian manual for life and practice), which recommends Christians say the Lord’s Prayer three times daily,¹³² perhaps along with or in lieu of the Shema (a prayer, which Jews prayed regularly and which set the direction of daily life; cf. Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

Just as there is a correlation between the Spirit’s work in Jesus’ ministry and the Spirit’s work in the Church, so also I see a correlation between Jesus’ prayer life and the prayer life of a local church.¹³³ In other words, as the disciples imitate Jesus and devote themselves to prayer, they discern the Father’s will and experience the Spirit’s work to build the Church. For example, 120 disciples devoted themselves to prayer (Acts 1:14), which prepared them for what the Spirit would do through them at Pentecost (Acts 1-2; cf. 4:24-31;¹³⁴ 6:4).¹³⁵ Thus prayer is foundational for effective disciple-making.

Exegesis of the Summary Paragraph, Acts 2:42-47

Acts 2:42 is a thesis statement summarizing what the first Christians devoted themselves to in the early Church in Jerusalem. Acts 2:43-47 is a summary paragraph of *how* they lived out their devotion in activity as an apostolic fellowship in the first few years of the Church showing what resulted from these activities.¹³⁶ The passage states,

129. Fernando, *Acts*, 121.

130. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 73.

131. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 73.

132. Fernando, *Acts*, 122.

133. Longenecker, “Acts,” in *EBC*, vol. 9, 290.

134. Fernando, *Acts*, 170.

135. Longenecker, “Acts,” in *EBC*, vol. 9, 289.

136. Longenecker, “Acts,” in *EBC*, vol. 9, 288-289.

⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

God was mightily at work through the early Church in Jerusalem, and everyone who heard about what God was doing was in awe. The signs being done through the Apostles in 2:43 signified to the Jews that the new age of the Messiah had come.¹³⁷ Throughout Acts, signs and wonders are closely linked with evangelism attesting to the authenticity of the gospel.¹³⁸ A vignette to illustrate this point is when Peter healed a crippled man, which resulted in the people's astonishment paving the road for an evangelistic sermon (3:1-26).

The early Church had a "togetherness" being "with one accord" (2:44) concerning their purpose in assembling at the Temple to hear the apostles' teaching (2:46), and in their community in general, sharing materially as any had need (2:44-45).¹³⁹ The verb "selling" with reference to possessions (2:45) was a customary imperfect, meaning they sold "from time to time."¹⁴⁰ This was not a past, once-for-all action renouncing all wealth and taking on poverty as a lifestyle; rather this was a recurring practice (i.e., Christians regularly liquidated assets) as anyone had need.¹⁴¹ F.F. Bruce believes everyone was selling their extra assets to share the proceeds as individual needs would arise.¹⁴² This was a description of *koinonia*, which "touched the pocketbook" but was not socialism or communism, this was not forced sharing.¹⁴³ This level of sharing was voluntary, based

137. Fernando, *Acts*, 122.

138. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 161.

139. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 161.

140. Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, *NLEKGNT*, s.v. "ἐπιπρασκον," Acts 2:45, 234.

141. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 162.

142. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 74.

143. Fernando, *Acts*, 122.

on spiritual unity, and when the spiritual flame began to flicker or weaken it became increasingly difficult to maintain this kind of fellowship (e.g., Acts 5:1-11; 6:1-6).¹⁴⁴

Congregational Meetings at the Temple

The Temple in Jerusalem was the center of worship in Judaism. Only one born Jewish or a circumcised convert known as a Proselyte could enter the Temple courts for worship.¹⁴⁵ Thus, the system of worship at the Temple created a separation from the Gentile world. The early Christians were Jewish, living in Jerusalem, and they met regularly at the Temple along with their Jewish countrymen (Acts 2:46; cf. 5:42). The favorite meeting place of the early Christians, as a large group, was a court of the Temple called Solomon's Colonnade (Acts 3:11; 5:12). Christians blended in with their countrymen until they gained the favor of the people and caught the attention of Jewish leadership by teaching the *kerygma* of the gospel of Jesus as Messiah (2:46-47; cf. 3:11-4:4; 5:12-16; 5:42).¹⁴⁶ Jewish Christians tried to stay within the fold of Judaism,¹⁴⁷ but their refocused eschatological hope¹⁴⁸ rendered Temple worship an incomplete form of worship (John 4:20-24).¹⁴⁹ When Stephen preached that God does not live in a house made by human hands and then accused the Jewish leadership of disobeying the Law, resisting the Spirit and killing the Messiah (Acts 7:44-53; cf. Isaiah 66:1),¹⁵⁰ this led to his martyrdom and the persecution and scattering of Christians (Acts 7:54-9:30; cf. 1:8).

Following the scattering of Christians, the Church (as a community) continued to be built up and edified. The verb *oikodomeo* means to construct an edifice, but was used

144. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 74.

145. Fernando, *Acts*, 318-319.

146. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 163.

147. Fernando, *Acts*, 122-123.

148. Longenecker, "Acts," in *EBC*, vol. 9, 291.

149. Fernando, *Acts*, 122-123.

150. J. Goetzmann, s.v. "oikos," in *NIDNTT*, vol. 2, 248.

figuratively to describe the “Church” being built up by Christ (Matthew 16:18), and the building up of Christian missionary communities called local churches (cf. Acts 9:31).¹⁵¹

A prime example of a missionary lay movement took place in Antioch (Acts 11:19-21). Some scholars believe the “Hellenists” (Greek speaking persons who had come in contact with Judaism, cf. 11:20)¹⁵² were worshipping with the Jews as God-fearers (non-circumcised Gentiles¹⁵³) in the local synagogue.¹⁵⁴ But these God-fearers likely would not have been full Proselytes (converts to Judaism) because of the requirement of circumcision and the related restrictions of the Law. When the gospel was preached, this paved the way for Jews and gentiles to come together in Jesus’ name. Luke tells the reader a great number of people came to faith, piquing the interest of Christian leadership in Jerusalem (11:22-24) and requiring the teamwork of Barnabas and Saul to disciple this large group for a whole year (11:25-26).

Acts 11:26 says they “met with the church and taught a great many people.” This is the first time “church” (ekklesia) is used to refer to a local church outside Jerusalem.¹⁵⁵ The word means “assembly” or “to gather together”; it is used somewhat synonymously with synagogue.¹⁵⁶ Interestingly the word “met” (also used in 11:26) is the verb form of synagogue, meaning “to gather together” a group.¹⁵⁷ Thus, Paul and Barnabas gathered together the people known as the church in Antioch, to be instructed in the teachings and the way of the gospel.¹⁵⁸ The implication of Jewish Christians ministering to Greeks is that God-fearers and Jews both came to Christ, probably through preaching at the local synagogue. Since the crowd was so large, it is also possible they gathered and

151. Arthur L. Farstad, ed. *The Majority Text Greek New Testament, Interlinear* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), s.v. “οικοδομεω,” note on Acts 9:31, 457.

152. Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, *NLEKGNT*, s.v. “ελληνιστης,” Acts 11:20, 255.

153. Fernando, *Acts*, 318-319.

154. Longenecker, “Acts,” in *EBC*, vol. 9, 400-401.

155. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 370-371.

156. L. Coenen, s.v. “ekklesia,” in *NIDNTT*, vol 1, 296-297.

157. Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, *NLEKGNT*, s.v. “συναχθηναι,” Acts 11:26, 256.

158. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 228.

were instructed at the local synagogue, at a large meeting hall,¹⁵⁹ or even a large house (similar to what was used in Corinth)¹⁶⁰ for the purpose of continued teaching.

Beyond Antioch, when the Apostle Paul brought the gospel to a city, he generally would preach the gospel and reason through the *kerygma* in the local synagogue (e.g., Acts 13:14-43; 17:1-4; 17:10-15; 18:4). After being rejected by the Jews, he would often then turn his attention to the gentiles (e.g., Acts 13:44-50; 17:4-9; 18:6). When given the opportunity Paul would establish a local church community for worship and to make disciples, appointing elders for shepherding, and he would check in on these congregations either personally or by letter for ongoing equipping and accountability (e.g., Acts 14:21-23; 18:7-11; cf. Titus 1:5-9). People from every tribe, tongue, and nation were uniting as one in the name of Jesus, thus fulfilling the Great Commission (Acts 15; cf. Galatians 1-4).¹⁶¹ Consequently many Jewish communities that rejected Jesus as Messiah cast Christians from their synagogues (e.g., Revelation 2:9-10; 3:7-12), creating the need for a location for worship, fellowship, and teaching.¹⁶² Since many first century Christians did not have buildings, where did they meet? This brings one back to Acts 2:46 and the description of meeting in homes.

Devotion to Fellowship from House-to-House

Acts 2:46 describes the first Christians in Jerusalem breaking bread with one another in homes. If this was communion, then these meetings were a kind of religious ceremony in small groups. If this was a common meal, then table fellowship was being practiced to meet the physical and social needs of the community. The phrase “they

159. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 370-371.

160. Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 228.

161. Fernando, *Acts*, 122-123.

162. Alan F. Johnson, “Revelation,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 451.

received their food” implies sharing a substantial meal like table fellowship.¹⁶³ Ajith Fernando asserts that the phrase, “they received their food with glad and generous hearts,” implies *koinonia* based on the *kerygma* of Jesus, which developed a generous or sincere “attitude toward each other that enabled them to truly enjoy each other.”¹⁶⁴

While teaching is not mentioned in Acts 2:46, it is implied in 2:42 and explicitly mentioned in 5:42, “And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.” One can infer this meant evangelism and discipleship was being accomplished, primarily by the Apostles (cf. Acts 2:42; 6:4), to make disciple-makers who could continue the process beyond the church in Jerusalem (e.g., 6:8-15; 8:4-40; 9:17-22, 28; 11:19-30).

In the rest of Acts there are descriptions of proclamation in public and teaching in private, usually in homes. For example, while Peter was in Joppa staying at Simon the Tanner’s house, many came to know the Lord. This implies he engaged in evangelism and discipleship while staying there (9:41-43). From there Peter was brought to the home of a Roman Centurion named Cornelius, where he shared the *kerygma* of the gospel¹⁶⁵ with a large crowd who was waiting for him; the result being many came to faith and were baptized (10:27-48a). One can assume when Peter was asked to remain with them “for some time” (v. 48b), this meant Jews and Gentiles had table fellowship together as Peter remained there to make disciples of Gentiles.¹⁶⁶ Peter was criticized for this by the circumcision party (11:2). But he defended his actions as a work of the Holy Spirit coupled with Cornelius’ claim that an angel had told him he and his whole *oikos* (Greek for household) would be saved through preaching by Peter (11:14).¹⁶⁷

163. Richard N. Longenecker, *Luke-Acts*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Revised Edition, ed. Tramper Longman III, and David E. Garland, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 758.

164. Fernando, *Acts*, 123.

165. Fernando, *Acts*, 336-337.

166. Fernando, *Acts*, 338.

167. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 364.

In the Roman world, houses had atriums or reception rooms that were often used for public activities, while dining rooms and such would be used for more private affairs. As Christians would meet in the atriums for worship, the service was open to everyone; thus, it was possible for unbelievers to come in uninvited (e.g., 1 Corinthians 14:23).¹⁶⁸ At the beginning of Acts these were likely house fellowships that developed into house churches in larger homes of wealthy Christians in such places as Corinth. But places like Corinth also had smaller fellowships such as the one that met in the home of Aquila and Prisca (1 Corinthians 16:19).¹⁶⁹ Later in Scripture one reads that this couple hosted a house church while living in Rome (Romans 16:3-5),

...and it appears Roman house churches were found in other homes clustered around Asyncritus (Rom. 16:14) and Philologus (Rom. 16:15)... Philemon, as a part of the greater church at Colossae, had a “church” in his home (Phile. 1-2), as did Nympha, who was apparently in that region but nearer the geographical church at Laodicea (Col. 4:15).

It becomes very apparent, then, that there were at root at least two “levels” of the “local church” in the New Testament era: the general area, or “city-church” (which gathered infrequently) as well as the particular, or “house church” (which gathered frequently).¹⁷⁰

These different house groups formed congregations that were not seen as separate churches, but rather a manifestation of the one church in a city.¹⁷¹ By the end of the first century the developed house church was one given over by the owner for use as a church for gatherings equivalent of what we would call the local church today.¹⁷²

The Need for Authentic Christianity in Worship and Community

In summary, the Jerusalem church had thousands of members who met as a congregation in the Temple courts for preaching, teaching, evangelism, prayer, and

168. Philip H. Towner, *The Letter to Timothy and Titus*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 191-192.

169. Fernando, *Acts*, 123.

170. Koivsto, *One Lord, One Faith*, 27.

171. Koivsto, *One Lord, One Faith*, 27-28.

172. Koivsto, *One Lord, One Faith*, 28.

worship. This carried on into homes as they met from house-to-house for, what was likely “the regular functions of the church... (cf. Acts 2:46-47).”¹⁷³ In time, as Christians were scattered from Jerusalem or cast from the synagogues in various cities, they met in homes, some larger and some smaller, for public worship and more intimate sharing of table fellowship.¹⁷⁴ Thus it seems necessary that for a Christian community to function as it should, all Christians ought to devote themselves to Jesus and the four spiritual activities of Acts 2:42 as an apostolic fellowship (i.e., a local church). Each church should be led by qualified leadership with Christians engaged in weekly corporate worship gatherings. And, for church members to meet each other’s fellowship needs, a church should develop some kind of small group system that enables Christians to use their spiritual gifts to build each other up and partner to engage the world with the gospel in everyday contexts, similar to Jesus with the Twelve.

By experience, I have concluded that people in the Pacific Northwest are skeptical by nature requiring an apologetic response of the church. But perhaps not the response one might expect. As Steve Timmis and Tim Chester said,

Modern Christianity has developed a rational apologetic... But the problem is not an intellectual problem. The problem is hearts that refuse to live under God’s reign. We reject God. It is a relational problem. And if it is a relational problem, it requires a relational apologetic.

What will commend the gospel are lives lived in obedience to the gospel and a community life that reflects God’s triune community of love... And they see that it is good to know God as they see the love of the Christian community. As Francis Schaeffer said, “Our relationship with each other is the criterion the world uses to judge whether our message is truthful. Christian community is the ultimate apologetic.”¹⁷⁵

I believe there are many methods of ministry that can work to make converts, but in order to make disciples that multiply requires an authentic faith community. This is what an unbelieving world is longing to see, a church that has closed the gap between

173. Koivsto, *One Lord, One Faith*, 27.

174. Towner, *The Letter to Timothy and Titus*, 191.

175. Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 175-176.

their rhetoric and reality. In order to build this kind of church starts with the leadership. And if Jesus focused His discipleship efforts on the Twelve, and if He is God's Son, then who's to say I or any other pastor, elder, deacon, or church leader can handle more than a small group of eight, ten, or twelve people? Thus I believe the people of Grace Church Seattle need to get back to the basics of disciple-making in the method of Jesus (Matthew 28:19-20). And it makes sense for Christians today to start with the structure of the Apostles as seen in Acts 2:42-47. Thus, in the following chapter I will seek to learn about various methods of disciple-making in churches throughout history and in today's western context that have emphasized an authentic, relational, and missional small group structure.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction: Questions of Recontextualization

In chapter two we discovered Jesus' plan for making disciples in community. The Apostles continued with His method as gospel communities spread from Jerusalem, to Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. I concluded many Americans are relationally starved, in need of meaningful community and that the best apologetic is a relational apologetic. For Jesus said in John 13:35, "They will know you are Christians by your love." In chapter one I made the case that the attractional-events and program-driven model of church caters to the consumeristic mindset, but does not necessarily build community. In this chapter I will continue to expand on this theme, and build the case for biblical community in small groups. I will explore the questions: how does a pastor of a program-driven church lead through transition to a cell-group model? And more specifically, how does one do children's and youth ministry in a cell-driven church?

Consumerism Hinders Biblical Community

Teri Elliott-Hart identifies key elements of a consumer culture: it is an impersonal market society, which identifies freedom with individualism and one's private life, and that consumerism creates unlimited needs that are insatiable.¹ Teri asks, "What is the impact of the blending of faith language and images with the language of commerce—is it a blessing for neighborhoods, or does it contribute to a dulling of the power of the language of faith?"² Erwin McManus, pastor of *Mosaic* in Los Angeles would say it does

1. Teri Elliott-Hart, "Challenges to Discipleship in the Context of Contemporary Consumer Culture," in *Reaching For the New Jerusalem: A Biblical and Theological Framework for the City*, ed. Seong Hyun Park, Aida Besancon Spencer, William David Spencer (Eugene, OR: WIPF n Stock, 2013), 123.

2. Elliott-Hart, "Challenges to Discipleship," in *Reaching For the New Jerusalem*, 121.

not dilute the effectiveness of communication, but enhances it by making it relevant. But he too questions if church leaders overestimate the effectiveness of methods, programs, or structures.³ Elliott-Hart intimates that all the branding, marketing strategies, and “selling of God” with the accumulation of stuff actually works against the values of Jesus, hindering the development of Christian community.⁴ Francis Chan agrees and would argue, “We like to think of ourselves as self-sufficient and independent, able to ‘make it on our own.’ Sadly, many Christians have adopted this individualistic mindset. Nobody is going to tell us how to spend our time or our money or tell us what to think.”⁵ With this mindset, is it any wonder the church in North American is struggling?

David Platt would speak plainly about the subject of consumerism affecting the North American Church; one can tell by the title of his first book *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith From the American Dream*. In it he challenges Christians to actually be disciples, followers of Christ who take the words of Jesus seriously and abandon their lives to Him.⁶ Platt asks why Christians often do exegetical gymnastics (my words) with a passage to get out of obeying Jesus. Christians tend to use the excuse, “What Jesus really meant was...”⁷ In essence Platt is asking if pastors and church leaders are eisegeting (reading their opinions into) the words of Jesus to fit the American version of Christianity in order to remain comfortable. But Jesus didn’t call His disciples to be comfortable; He called His disciples to make disciples using the Holy Spirit-led methods of Jesus. Platt makes a bold statement against consumerism in church,

I am part of a system that has created a whole host of means and methods, plans and strategies for doing church that require little if any power from God. And it’s not just pastors who are involved in this charade. I am concerned that all of us—pastors and church members in our culture—have blindly embraced an

3. Erwin Raphael McManus, “The Global Intersection,” in *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives*, ed. Lenard Sweet (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 236, 239-241, 246.

4. Elliott-Hart, “Challenges to Discipleship,” in *Reaching For the New Jerusalem*, 124-127.

5. Francis Chan, *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2012), 296.

6. David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith From the American Dream*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2010), 10-21.

7. Platt, *Radical*, 13.

American dream mentality that emphasizes our abilities and exalts our names in the ways we do church.

Consider what it takes for successful businessmen or businesswomen, effective entrepreneurs and hardworking associates, shrewd retirees and idealistic students to combine forces with a creative pastor to grow a “successful church” today. Clearly it doesn’t require the power of God to draw a crowd in our culture. A few key elements that we manufacture will suffice.

First, we need a good performance. ...someone who can captivate the crowds...

Next, we need a place to hold the crowds that will come, so we gather all our resources to build a multimillion-dollar facility to house the performance...

Finally, once the crowds get there, we need to have something to keep them coming back. So we need to start programs—first-class, top-of-the-line programs—for kids, for youth, for families, for every age and stage.⁸

Platt is being facetious, but he is doing so to make a point. In *Radical* he clarifies his sarcasm as he talks about how shocked he was when he read books by pastors about how to lead and grow a church. These pastors (whom he respects) talk about vision casting, planning, and strategizing from a consumer-driven mindset.⁹ “We’ll give them a latte when they walk in the door, and then we’ll provide state-of-the-art entertainment for their children while treating them to a great show that leaves them feeling good when they drive away...”¹⁰ Again, sarcasm, but I think he is hitting on a nerve that is counter to Jesus’ values, and Jeff Vanderstelt would validate his words.

Vanderstelt was struggling to fit the mold of the American model of a “church-as-event-only” gathering. He had been a youth pastor at Willow Creek and faced the pressure to perform. He became a pastor because he loves God and people, but he found himself in an administrative management position running an organization and becoming more distant from people (I can identify). He fell into depression. He began to realize something was clearly broken in North American churches when his father started talking about learning to make disciples from his new discipleship pastor.

Vanderstelt’s parents were learning to create an atmosphere for outreach and

8. Platt, *Radical*, 48-49.

9. David Platt, *Radical Together: Unleashing the People of God for the Purpose of God* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2011), 105-107.

10. Platt, *Radical Together*, 107.

discipleship by throwing neighborhood parties to get into discussions about Jesus. Vanderstelt thought, “My parents were the epitome of hospitality. They arranged their lives and home so that people would want to be there. It didn’t seem remarkable to me when I was growing up...”¹¹ And then it dawned on him, his parents had been doing ministry all along but it was not validated by the church.¹² This calls into question models of ministry (as previously covered in chapters one and two) that specifically concern how Jesus’ methodology of making disciples should inform North American churches in places like the relationally-starved Seattle area. In the following section Robert Coleman, Joel Comiskey and others outline Jesus’ practical methods of ministry that meet these relational needs and which can be implemented in today’s culture.

Jesus’ Model of Ministry Informs Our Model of Ministry

Robert Coleman would describe Jesus’ lifestyle as one of evangelism, a strategy He modeled and expected His disciples to orient their lives around.¹³ Jesus’ vision was a gospel-redeemed people, living in community called the Church, governed by Jesus’ teachings to then go out and make disciples of all nations.¹⁴ Church leaders should be exemplary disciple-makers who likewise model Jesus’ lifestyle for their congregation.

Coleman distills Jesus’ method of ministry to eight practical principles in his book *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. The first principle is *Selection*: a leader should identify a few potential leaders who have demonstrated leadership qualities in order to invest in them.¹⁵ The second principle is *Association*: the leader needs to make a practice of being with his or her disciples to be able to train them in everyday life.¹⁶ The third

11. Jeff Vanderstelt, *Saturate: Being Disciples of Jesus in the Everyday Stuff of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 23.

12. Vanderstelt, *Saturate*, 19-22, 24.

13. Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Spire, 1993), 14.

14. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 18-19.

15. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 31-34.

16. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 37.

principle is *Consecration*: this involves the way of the cross, dying to one's self, and living for those one shepherds (Mark 8:34-38).¹⁷ Those being discipled should also be willing to pay the price to learn how to make disciples as a lifestyle.¹⁸ The fourth principle is *Impartation*: the leader and disciple learn to depend on the work of the Holy Spirit to guide them through life and ministry. Evangelism is, "altogether the Spirit's work. All the disciples were asked to do was to let the Spirit have complete charge of their lives."¹⁹ If pastors rely on their natural gifting alone instead of the Spirit to bring out their spiritual gifts, then there will be much heavy lifting and potentially little fruit.²⁰

The fifth principle of the Master's plan is *Demonstration*: disciple-makers must demonstrate the way of Christ. This includes prayer, knowledge of Scripture²¹ and *how* to draw people in and connect the truths of God to their lives. In other words, class is always in session. The leader should never ask people to do anything the leader is not willing to do himself.²² This leads to the sixth principle, *Delegation*. Jesus showed His disciples how to minister, then He commissioned and sent them to do ministry (Matt. 10:5-15; 28:19-20; cf. Mark 6:7; Luke 10:1).²³ Jesus sent the Twelve knowing they would be sheep among wolves and so He instructed them to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves (Matt. 10:16). He explained the Spirit would teach them what to say in times of trial (Matt. 10:17-23). Coleman said about the commissioning of the disciples, "They were going forth with a revolutionary gospel, and when it was obeyed, it effected a revolutionary change in people and their society."²⁴ Thus, Jesus delegated the responsibility of Spirit-dependent ministry to affect a worldwide spiritual awakening.

17. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 50-51.

18. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 51.

19. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 66.

20. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 70.

21. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 73-74.

22. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 74-77.

23. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 81-83.

24. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 85.

The seventh principle of the Master's plan is *Supervision*: Jesus used the experiences of His disciples to teach them truth, but cautioned them "against pride in their accomplishments"²⁵ not allowing them to hang their identity on success or failure.²⁶ A danger for Christians, leaders, elders, pastors and even an entire church is to rest on past laurels without seeking the Spirit's lead to produce fresh fruit. This can stagnate growth as a church becomes inward-focused. Christ followers must remember there are always more people to be harvested for the Kingdom of God (Matt. 9:37).²⁷ This leads to the ultimate goal of the Master's plan, *Reproduction*: pastors and elders need to lead by action with a strategic vision to multiply our efforts to reach people for Christ (Matt. 9:38). Jesus expected His disciples to reproduce themselves in others. If the disciples had failed, none of us would have heard the gospel.²⁸ But because they implemented Jesus' plan, the spread of the gospel proved to be a worldwide movement with implications for church leaders and would-be disciple-makers today. But are we (North American evangelicals) living the lifestyle modeled by Jesus and His apostles? Billy Graham was asked the question,

'If you were a pastor of a large church in a principal city, what would be your plan of action?' Mr. Graham replied: 'I think one of the first things I would do would be to get a small group of eight or ten or twelve people around me that would meet a few hours a week and pay the price! It would cost them something in time and effort. I would share with them everything I have, over a period of years. Then I would actually have twelve ministers among the laypeople who in turn could take eight or ten or twelve more and teach them.'²⁹

Graham implied he still would have preached the gospel to large crowds, but his focus would have been on a small group of potential disciple-makers with the purpose of

25. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 93.

26. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 96.

27. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 98.

28. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 102.

29. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 116.

growing the church through them. Thus, in this quote Graham makes the case for a modern cell-model of ministry in the mold of Jesus to make disciples that multiply.

The Necessity (or not?) of a Building to Make Disciples

In Joel Comiskey's book *2000 Years of Small Groups* he shows through the Gospels that Jesus' method of ministry was not dependent on attracting people to a synagogue, but rather in calling to Himself a small band of followers, whom He trained for ministry through everyday life. In the first few pages of his book, Comiskey lists more than fifteen examples of Jesus ministering in homes and he intuits, "Jesus also had a house church base...the home of Peter."³⁰ I question if Peter's home was actually Jesus' base of operation in Galilee, but this would make sense of the Gospel narratives, which show Jesus ministered in a zig-zag fashion around that region. Comiskey continues, "Most likely Peter's house was a place where Jesus and his disciples could pray, enjoy community, and develop spiritually. It also served as a meeting room and a place of healing and instruction. You might even call it the first model house church."³¹ Comiskey observes in the Gospels how Jesus taught a pattern for reaching new communities with His message: first, establish a "beachhead" in a new city or town through *one* home (*oikos*) rather than by going door-to-door (Luke 10:7); and second, work through the relationships and family members of that home to penetrate their social networks in their community (Luke 10:8-9).³² Coleman would add that Jesus' master plan of multiplication depended on the strategy of establishing a beachhead to penetrate social networks through potential key leaders and that this "...is not to be minimized."³³

30. Joel Comiskey, *2000 Years of Small Groups: A History of Cell Ministry in the Church* (Moreno Valley, CA; CCS Publishing, 2014), 17-18.

31. Comiskey, *2000 Years of Small Groups*, 18.

32. Comiskey, *2000 Years of Small Groups*, 18-21.

33. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 83.

Whether or not Peter's home was the first house church / base of operation, it is undeniable Jesus' most impactful discipleship conversations were not in Synagogues but rather the intimate small group settings of life. "Jesus didn't simply gather them once a week for a 'discipleship class.' He lived with them, shared financial resources..." and Comiskey adds, "...taught them about kingdom values."³⁴ For Jesus, this not only took place within homes, but through everyday conversations with disciples as they walked along the way (John 14), in a fishing boat (Luke 5:1-11), or when resting by a well (John 4). Jesus' methodology was not dependent on buildings, houses, or formal teaching; rather He talked about God's commands and applying them to everyday life in line with Deuteronomy 6:6-7. Dennis McCallum and Jessica Lowery explain that in biblical times rabbis would spend years living with their disciples, teaching their way of life through dependence on their understanding and teaching of the Scriptures. This was more than educational process of information transfer (like in a classroom), and it was, as McCallum and Lowery would describe, "...personalized education where two men formed a close, trusting relationship in which the rabbi could sense and minister to inner spiritual needs in his discipleship... The intensive personal attention...in this style of training dictated that a rabbi focus on no more than a few disciples at a time."³⁵ Francis Chan would add a disciple-maker can accomplish more by living with people in a short period of time than in platform-driven, classroom settings. Why? Because when one devotes time to people by living with them, one gains insight into whom they truly are.³⁶

After Jesus' commissioned His disciples to go make disciples, Comiskey shows in Acts (beginning in chapter 2) that the strategy of the early Church was, "...reaching the household structure (*oikos*) with the gospel message and then reaching the entire

34. Comiskey, *2000 Years of Small Groups*, 18.

35. Dennis McCallum and Jessica Lowery, *Organic Discipleship: Mentoring Others Into Spiritual Maturity and Leadership* (Columbus, OH: New Paradigm, 2012), 4.

36. Chan, *Multiply*, 51-73.

city.”³⁷ Comiskey would describe this as an essential part of the cell-driven or cell-group church, and would prescribe this as an effective model for engaging every believer in the ministry of making disciples who make disciples through social networks.³⁸ Ralph Neighbour Jr. takes this a step further and explains that in order to understand cell-group ministry today, one must understand the *oikos* in the New Testament and the strategy of the early Christians to penetrate this structure.³⁹

Neighbour shows it was common for Christians to meet and minister in homes under the *oikos* structure. For example, Peter stayed with and ministered to the *oikos* of Simon the Tanner, using his home as a base of operation to minister to the people of Joppa (Acts 9:43-10:23). Similarly, Peter was invited to stay with and evangelize the home of the Roman Centurion, Cornelius. When Peter arrived, Cornelius had gathered his relatives and close friends (his social network) to hear the gospel (10:24-48). Again, Neighbour shows in Acts 16 that when influential household members come to Christ, the gospel penetrates their entire *oikos*. Specifically, when Lydia (16:15) or the Philippian jailer (16:33) came to know the Lord, the members of both households believed and were baptized. Neighbour goes on to list twelve *oikos* (house) churches the Apostle Paul sent greetings to in the Book of Acts and the epistles of Paul (cf., Acts 18:1, Romans 16:5, 10, 11; 1 Corinthians 1:11, 1:16, 16:15, 16:19; Philippians 4:22; Colossians 4:15; and 2 Timothy 1:16, 4:19).⁴⁰ This seems to have been a highly effective, organic, and relational strategy in regular use by the Apostles and led by the Holy Spirit. Neighbour emphasizes the early Christians were not concerned with building a place for ministry such as a Temple, a synagogue, or a church building;

37. Comiskey, *2000 Years of Small Groups*, 21.

38. Comiskey, *2000 Years of Small Groups*, 22-31.

39. Ralph Neighbour Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here? A Guidebook for the Cell Group Church* (Houston, TX: TOUCH, 1990), 114.

40. Neighbour Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here?* 118-120, 454.

rather, the disciples focused on building the church through relationships.⁴¹ Francis Chan reminds us the people of God *are* the holy temple of God (Eph. 2:19-22),⁴² and so theologically it makes sense this is how the early church grew, through social networks.

Neighbour shows how the *oikos* of the first century had a basic structure that when penetrated by the gospel could have a great impact for the building of the Church namely, the people of God with the Spirit of God. Neighbour defines two members of the *oikos* family. The *oikonomos* was literally a servant whom the master, "...put in charge of the servants in his household..."⁴³ like a head servant who oversees the basic physical needs of the home. So also there was a person tasked with building up (*oikodomeo*) or ministering to the spiritual needs of the home. Per Neighbour, Jesus said, in His interaction with Peter in Matthew 16:16-18, that He would "build" (*oikodomeo*) His church based on the confession, "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God." Neighbour also shows that the Church is built up (*oikodomeo*) through members of a local church ministering to one another by using their spiritual gifts for edification in community (Ephesians 4:15-16).⁴⁴ Neighbour believes this is the scriptural basis for the cell-group church today: Christians in small groups penetrating their *oikos* communities – networks of friends, family members, business associates, and neighbors – with the good news and power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In *The First Urban Christians* by Wayne Meeks, he affirms the above⁴⁵ and explains further the structure of the early church. Because Christianity was an offshoot of Judaism, Christians borrowed heavily from its structure. The local Jewish community had two types of groups for regular meetings, the association and the household. The

41. Neighbour Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here?* 121.

42. Chan, *Multiply*, 287.

43. Neighbour Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here?* 121.

44. Neighbour Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here?* 40-41, 121, 246-247.

45. Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 74-84.

association involved membership with regular meetings often in synagogues for Sabbath worship, education, communal events and decision-making.⁴⁶ Meeks states, “The Jewish communities were construed legally as collegia and adopted many aspects of collegial structure.”⁴⁷ Thus Judaism was legally registered with the State and allowed to develop houses into Synagogues or build buildings for such purposes.⁴⁸ Christian communities were legally allowed to congregate so long as they were associated with Judaism, but often Christians were expelled from the synagogue community and were in need of a safe place to meet that would afford privacy, allow for a degree of intimacy, and stability. It is unlikely that these meetings would have taken place in large meeting halls because of lack of political support or a lack of money to rent a large assembly hall.⁴⁹ Thus early Christianity was somewhat dependent on the wealthy who would allow *ekklesia* (church) meetings in their homes.⁵⁰ The weekly worship would have included such elements as singing of songs and hymns, reading of creeds, reading of Scripture, preaching and teaching based on the Scripture, prayer, benedictions, communion, occasional baptisms, and collection of funds.⁵¹

Another development of the early church was philosophic or rhetorical schools to train leaders of local congregations in preaching, teaching, doctrine and apologetics. It is thought the earliest school, alluded to in Acts 19:9, was located in Ephesus.⁵² It is believed Paul followed rhetorical models founding local groups not organized as cultic communities but rather “...as ‘scholastic communities,’ pursuing an ‘intellectual mission’ in ways that often resembled a ‘debating society.’”⁵³ Meeks concludes the first century church was developing and did not have a consistent ecclesiastical structure, but that

46. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 77-84.

47. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 80.

48. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 80.

49. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 143.

50. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 76.

51. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 143-150.

52. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 81-84.

53. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 82.

the household was “...the basic context within which most if not all the local Pauline groups established themselves, and the manifold life of voluntary associations, the special adaptation of the synagogue...and the organization of...philosophical schools all provide examples of groups solving certain problems that the Christians...had to face.”⁵⁴ In short, Christians-in-community adapted to their circumstances with commitment to doctrine, a local fellowship, regular worship, and communal mission. The following gives examples of such groups throughout history.

Missional Small Groups in Church History

Steve Timmis leads a church called The Crowded House in Sheffield, England and is the regional director of Acts 29 in Western Europe. He co-authored several books with Tim Chester, which attempt to help Christians rediscover missional living through small groups. Timmis and Chester observe that people in England no longer attend church based on the attraction of an event and that Christianity is marginalized in places like England.⁵⁵ Therefore they believe local churches need to shift the “...focus from putting on attractional events to creating attractional communities. Our marginal status is an opportunity to rediscover the missionary call of the people of God.”⁵⁶ So, how does an events-driven church become an attractional community?

Timmis and Chester explain that a church becomes attractive to the world when the Christians in that church catch a vision for a gospel-centered communal and missional identity.⁵⁷ This happens when Christians emphasize life-on-life connections as an everyday church on an everyday mission.⁵⁸ This is not possible if Christians only see each other on Sundays. Thus, disciples of Jesus should be purposing to live as small

54. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 84.

55. Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Everyday Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 24.

56. Chester and Timmis, *Everyday Church*, 10.

57. Chester and Timmis, *Everyday Church*, 155.

58. Chester and Timmis, *Everyday Church*, 28.

gospel communities during the week, supporting one another through encouragement, care, and edification.⁵⁹ Christians in these gospel communities should focus on figuring out how to work together to reach their neighbors for Christ.⁶⁰ In the truest sense, these are missional groups following an ancient path⁶¹ similar to the monastic communities organized by Saint Patrick to reach the people of Ireland.

George Hunter III writes about Saint Patrick's missional community methodology in *The Celtic Way of Evangelism, How Christianity Can Reach the West...AGAIN*. Patrick and his followers successfully reached the people of Ireland with the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ by ministering as a traveling apostolic band of "...a dozen or so people, including priests, seminarians, laymen, and laywomen."⁶² This ministering team would move near to a tribe in Ireland, ask permission of the tribal king to share the message with the people, and then the Christians would live alongside the people serving and interacting with them in everyday life. The Christians would regularly engage the Celts in conversation looking for receptive people and opportunities to pray for the sick, counsel people, and mediate conflicts.⁶³ As Timmis and Chester would put it, Saint Patrick and his band were an everyday church with a message and a lifestyle that was unlike that of the culture-at-large, and so they became to the Irish an attractional community.⁶⁴

Part of becoming an attractional community is learning to speak the language of the people, which includes adopting the common metaphors and colloquialisms of the culture often unique to their environment. Michael Green, in *Evangelism in the Early Church*, calls this the work of translation, taking biblical concepts (foreign to the hearer),

59. Chester and Timmis, *Everyday Church*, 156-157.

60. Chester and Timmis, *Everyday Church*, 37-57.

61. Chester and Timmis, *Everyday Church*, 158.

62. George G. Hunter III. *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West...AGAIN* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2010), 9.

63. Hunter III. *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 9.

64. Chester and Timmis, *Everyday Church*, 49-50, 56, 127.

and looking for ways to communicate in the local everyday common language.⁶⁵

Chester and Timmis would argue Christians in the West need to learn new methods of communication and new ways of doing church that is culturally relevant in order to reach the unchurched who would never otherwise step foot into a church building.⁶⁶ Saint Patrick was a master at the Art of Translation of the gospel to the Celtic people. He knew that the reason the Romans were unsuccessful in converting the Irish was because they were unbending in their approach; they had not done the work of translation and therefore wrote off the Celtic people as barbarians uninterested in the gospel and unconvertible.⁶⁷ Patrick, however, knew how the Irish thought, he knew they had “remarkable imaginations” and so he knew that creative forms of communication such as stories, drama, song, poetry, and visual arts would be a more effective way to convey the gospel message. And this way of ministry was effective in reaching the Celts. After weeks and months of living beside and ministering to a particular tribe, a local congregation would emerge that “...would have been astonishingly indigenous.”⁶⁸ Patrick’s band and the new Christians would then build a small chapel intended to serve multiple congregations. Once a chapel was established, one of Patrick’s apprentices would remain as the priest and one or two of the settlement’s young and promising disciples would join Patrick’s band in training for ministry, and then the process would begin again as they would go on to the next tribe. Patrick continued this style of ministry until his death in 460 AD and thus within his lifetime his mission planted about seven hundred churches, ordained about a thousand priests, and influenced around 30 to 40 of Ireland’s 150 tribes to become Christian.⁶⁹

65. Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church, Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 165-168.

66. Chester and Timmis, *Everyday Church*, 157.

67. Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 5 & 7.

68. Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 10.

69. Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 10-11.

Patrick did not set out to build a chapel and wait for people to come through the doors. Rather, these apostolic bands went out to the people, loved them, served them, lived alongside them, and soon the Celts were attracted to these communities, joining them, and then they would find themselves becoming Christian.⁷⁰ Similarly, John Wesley who ministered more than a millennium later believed, "...it is the duty of the Church to go to the people."⁷¹ And so he preached in the open-air and helped unbelievers form communities in which they could continue to grow in Christ. He developed the "class" meeting and "bands" for the purpose of regular spiritual oversight and in-depth accountability. A "class" would meet weekly for the purpose of spiritual conversations in mixed gender groups with about eleven Christians living in close proximity to one another.⁷² "Bands" were smaller, not mixed gender, and they were designed to go deep into confession of sin, and the testimony of Christian experiences.⁷³ In essence, "class" meetings were like a cell-group (which I will get more into later) and "bands" were like accountability groups.

It is important to understand how the "class" meetings got started because this informs disciple-makers about how one could potentially develop groups and leaders for the purpose of multiplication. Toward the beginning of the Methodist movement, leaders were sent to collect funds for the poor from members of a "society" (like a congregation) living in the same neighborhood. Wesley recognized Christian converts needed spiritual oversight and that these collectors of funds were already in an ideal situation to ask spiritual questions when they would enter the homes of their assigned people for the weekly collection.⁷⁴ This is similar to the shepherding of Richard Baxter, who would visit

70. Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 44-45.

71. James Burns, *Revival: Their Laws And Leaders* (London, UK: Kessinger), 302.

72. Burns, *Revival*, 296.

73. Robert Coleman, *Nothing To Do But To Save Souls: John Wesley's Charge to his Preachers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1990), 35.

74. Burns, *Revival*, 295-296.

twelve or so homes per week for the purpose of shepherding.⁷⁵ Unlike Baxter's system, Wesley delegated this responsibility to laymen, thus everyone could be visited weekly as opposed to yearly in Baxter's system. But the downside to Wesley's system is that it relied upon laymen not adequately trained. And so these leaders were in need of discipleship, which for Wesley was done through on-the-job training.⁷⁶ This hits on the principles of delegation, supervision, and reproduction, which Robert Coleman recommends to adequately equip disciple-makers to make disciples.⁷⁷

Wesley realized it was too difficult for just one person to effectively pastor a church, or to visit eleven different homes in a week. Thus Wesley developed weekly "class" meetings for all eleven people to meet at one time.⁷⁸ Chester and Timmis might say this was not an everyday church, but at the least this created a more regular time of meeting than only on Sundays. And I am guessing these people would have developed close relationships with one another, which likely would have resulted in everyday ministry to one another.

During a "class" meeting, Joel Comiskey tells us the leader inquired of each person's spiritual life asking, "How does your soul prosper?"⁷⁹ The leader was then instructed "to advise, reprove, comfort, and exhort" each individual based on what was shared during the meeting. As a result, each Methodist had regular spiritual oversight. If one chose not to attend class meetings, then that one was automatically disqualified from being a part of the "society" (the quarterly gathering for celebration).⁸⁰

Chester and Timmis have stated that often people do not want to join the Crowded House because too much is expected of them. Their theory is people in

75. Andrew Purves, *Pastoral Theology in the Classical Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 2001), 112.

76. Burns, *Revival*, 296-298.

77. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 79-109.

78. Burns, *Revival*, 296.

79. Comiskey, *2000 Years of Small Groups*, 168.

80. Coleman, *Nothing To Do But To Save Souls*, 34.

England are individualistic, self-sufficient, comfortable, fearful, and have a hard time being with people (or new people) in new situations.⁸¹ Being part of a missional or gospel community conversely breaks all of this down and forces one to think of Christ, community, and mission *before* self. In my experience, this creates a great challenge for Christians conditioned by a consumer-driven mindset to believe ministry is done by the professionals at the church building. But in reading history it seems clear that the church is at its best (in terms of mission and disciple-making) when people band together in small groups to develop a missionally Christ-centered and communal identity. So, what kind of structure could a pastor develop today that transitions a consumer, attractional-events and program-driven church to become small group oriented with a focus on mission? I believe the cell-driven model is a viable and biblical model.

The Cell-Driven Model, an Organized Organism

Moses Tay explains the cell church is a “reformation of structure” to be more like the first century church, which met in homes.⁸² Lawrence Khong agrees and states this is more of a “...Go structure...than a *Come* structure.”⁸³ By “*Come* structure” he is referring to attractional-events and programs dependent on a building. Khong uses Acts 2:42-47 as scriptural support for cells meeting in homes with preaching taking place at the “Temple” (church building).⁸⁴ Graham Tomlin states, “The emphasis of this way of practicing church lies firmly on two interlocking themes – community and evangelism.”⁸⁵ In other words, the cell church emphasizes mission and small groups as a functional management structure to shepherd Christians to live the Great Commission lifestyle.⁸⁶

81. Chester and Timmis, *Everyday Church*, 159-160.

82. Moses Tay, “The Cell Church in Singapore,” in *Church Without Walls: A Global Examination of the Cell Church*, ed. Michael Green (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2002), 8.

83. Lawrence Khong, *The Apostolic Cell Church* (Singapore, SGP: TOUCH, 2000), 60.

84. Khong, *The Apostolic Cell Church*, 36, 60, 133.

85. Graham Tomlin, “Cell Church: Theologically Sound?” in *Church Without Walls*, ed. Michael Green, 102.

86. Khong, *The Apostolic Cell Church*, 102-103.

The concept of “cell” comes from biology, which teaches a healthy cell in the body naturally reproduces. Likewise a healthy Christian group with the life of the Spirit will grow and multiply.⁸⁷ Comiskey defines a cell as “...*a group of three to fifteen people who meet weekly outside of the church building for the purpose of evangelism, community, and discipleship with the goal of multiplication* [italics in original].”⁸⁸

Comiskey teaches that a cell-driven church does not simply have cell groups as one of their programs, rather cell groups *are the ministry* outside the Sunday celebration and all leaders are to be involved in cell groups with the goal of growing the church through leader development.⁸⁹ Khong agrees and explains that multiple ministry program options in a church create organizational competition, which zaps people’s energy and can doom any attempt to transition a traditional church to the cell model.⁹⁰ With regard to the structural problem of transitioning from a traditionally program-driven church to a cell church, Khong states:

You cannot successfully overlay a cell structure on top of an existing structure that includes the usual Sunday school classes, youth and adult fellowships, men’s and women’s ministries, and so on. To make a transition, some churches may need to run two structures for a while, but if you do not dismantle something soon, the drain on your leadership team will doom your efforts to failure.⁹¹

One problem many traditionally program-driven ministries face, according to Moses Tay, is that the pastor is expected to meet everyone’s spiritual care needs. This creates a bottle-neck effect of numerical and spiritual growth⁹² because only a few are using their spiritual gifts to minister to the crowd. In other words, program-driven ministries tend to train Christians to sit in a pew to be ministered to, rather than for the pastor to train the people to use their gifts to minister to one another (Eph. 4:11-16).

87. Khong, *The Apostolic Cell Church*, 11.

88. Joel Comiskey, *The Church that Multiplies: Growing a Healthy Cell Church in North America* (Moreno Valley, CA: CCS Publishing, 2007), 20.

89. Comiskey, *The Church That Multiplies*, 62, 88-92.

90. Khong, *The Apostolic Cell Church*, 190-191.

91. Khong, *The Apostolic Cell Church*, 190.

92. Tay, “The Cell Church in Singapore,” in *Church Without Walls*, 2-4.

To resolve this problem, Rick Warren's "purpose driven" model emphasizes seeker sensitive services and events to attract a crowd and draw people to the core for discipleship and to serve the crowd.⁹³ Comiskey has a similar solution with a different emphasis, he believes Jesus' method of outreach and disciple-making worked in the reverse, "from the core to the crowd."⁹⁴ Both models emphasize small groups and a system of disciple-making through equipping, books, and class materials.⁹⁵ However, a contrast can be seen between the two models of ministry in Saddleback near Lake Forest, California, and New Hope in Portland, Oregon. The first has an emphasis of seeker sensitive services and forming affinity groups that are closed after six months and which do not necessarily meet weekly, have a variety of curriculums based on the interest of the group, and which exist for an average of two years.⁹⁶ At New Hope the emphasis on Sunday worship is to celebrate the resurrection power of the Lord Jesus Christ,⁹⁷ and small groups are continuously open to new comers as they, "...are expected to reach someone new every six months; their groups have longer life expectancy—perhaps because the periodic new members reconstitute the group to some degree."⁹⁸ A difference between the churches is one places the emphasis of outreach on Sundays, and the other emphasizes outreach through small groups.

Comiskey comments that every member of a church is to be seen as a minister, and a cell group meeting is the best context in which every member can practice their spiritual gifts.⁹⁹ For Khong, the exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in cell group meetings is essential to provide an environment in which believers can experience the

93. Rick Warren, *Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 207-238.

94. Comiskey, *The Church That Multiplies*, 52, 89.

95. George G. Hunter III, *Church for the Unchurched* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 90-92; see also Joel Comiskey, *The Church That Multiplies*, 87-108.

96. Hunter III, *Church for the Unchurched*, 90-92.

97. Hunter III, *Church for the Unchurched*, 85.

98. Hunter III, *Church for the Unchurched*, 92.

99. Comiskey, *The Church That Multiplies*, 109-110.

presence of God.¹⁰⁰ Both Khong and Comiskey believe the cell group is an expression of church just as much as a Sunday service. The difference is that in a cell group, an individual can serve, using their spiritual gifts to edify and build up the body of Christ in a more intimate context (Ephesians 4:11-16).¹⁰¹ Khong explains these cell groups are linked together in zones as congregations so that the leadership can “prepare God’s people for works of service” (Ephesians 4:11-12) through close supervision, coaching, and weekly worship celebrations, but the cell group is to be the smallest structural unit within the church for edification and evangelism.¹⁰²

The emphasis in the cell church is to concentrate on leadership development, “...first you build the leaders. Leaders build the groups.”¹⁰³ Comiskey states, “Such development simply doesn’t happen very often in a choir group, usher group, Sunday school class, or board meeting. Potential leaders are best developed in holistic groups that emphasize evangelism, community, discipleship, and multiplication.”¹⁰⁴

Jim Putman, Pastor of Real Life Ministries, points out Jesus was an *intentional leader* who developed a *reproducible process*, which required a *relational environment* of small groups to make disciples.¹⁰⁵ Putman believes pastors should intentionally connect disciples together in small groups so they can serve together, eat together, pray together, and learn how to work as a team to become fishers of men. He recommends using the *Real Life Discipleship Training Manual* he co-authored to develop disciple-making leaders and groups. I have used this at Grace for leader development and believe this is a good follow-up to *The Master Plan of Evangelism* because it shows specifically how to make disciples using Jesus’ method in today’s North American

100. Khong, *The Apostolic Cell Church*, 65-66.

101. Khong, *The Apostolic Cell Church*, 31-42; see also Comiskey, *The Church that Multiplies*, 87-92.

102. Khong, *The Apostolic Cell Church*, 46.

103. Comiskey, *The Church That Multiplies*, 89.

104. Comiskey, *The Church that Multiplies*, 94.

105. Jim Putman, *Real Life Discipleship: Building Churches That Make Disciples* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2010), 35-36.

context. I would add that a book on doctrine (such as *25 Basic Bible Studies* by Francis Schaeffer) should also be used to supplement Putman's material.

With all this talk of small groups, this leads to the question: should a cell-driven Church sell their building and only meet in homes? Bill Beckham says no. He points out in his parable of "The Two-Winged Church" that the New Testament church was balanced between the small group concept and corporate large group worship (see Appendix F).¹⁰⁶ Comiskey agrees and emphasizes the cell-driven church should focus on Sunday services for celebration and cell groups for shepherding and evangelism.¹⁰⁷ Khong agrees and teaches the cell is the church and that cell-groups need to be linked together in location-based zones where a zone pastor equips, supervises, coaches and holds the cell leaders accountable to disciple-making in the cell-driven model. This creates a framework for a network of mutual support. Khong believes zones should come together for a weekly Sunday celebration and for evangelistic events throughout the year under the authority of one leadership.¹⁰⁸ Christian Schwarz, author of *Natural Church Development* and *Paradigm Shift in the Church*, agrees that Christians should not try to function independently of the larger body because in doing so, each group could devolve into an unorganized, relativistic, spiritualistic group of independent thinkers who unintentionally or intentionally drift from the Apostle's teaching and thus no longer function as a local church.¹⁰⁹

How does one measure "success" in a cell-driven church? Comiskey believes success is measured by turning members into ministers who lead groups to make disciples who make disciples.¹¹⁰ Khong states, "The key to raising up a successful cell

106. Bill Beckham, "The Church with Two Wings," in *Church Without Walls*, 27-30.

107. Comiskey, *The Church That Multiplies*, 90-92.

108. Khong, *The Apostolic Cell Church*, 35-42.

109. Christian Schwarz, *Paradigm Shift in the Church: How Natural Church Development Can Transform Theological Thinking* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart, 1999), 40-48.

110. Comiskey, *The Church that Multiplies*, 88.

church, or transitioning to that model, lies in the *equipping process*. The cell church structure depends on effective training and nurture of a body of believers who are growing in spiritual maturity and gifting.”¹¹¹ Moses Tay adds that groups are expected to grow and multiply every 12 to 18 months or that group is deemed unhealthy.¹¹² This may be aggressive, and actually work against the goal of developing community, but if leaders are being developed it is plausible a mature group of adults could grow and multiply in this time-span. To do so would require Holy Spirit guidance and help.

For a cell-group church to thrive, Green, Comiskey, and Khong recommend that a church’s focus should be on cell meetings and Sunday celebration (also known as the “Two-Winged Church,” the idea being that throughout history the Church has thrived when it has emphasized large gatherings for worship and small gatherings of members using their spiritual gifts for edification and evangelism).¹¹³ Khong warns that if pastors of a cell-driven church are not involved in cell ministry, the church will take a nose dive. Additionally, he insists that elders and pastors be in 100% agreement that cell ministry be *that* church’s management and shepherding structure in order to move forward with the transition from programs to cell.¹¹⁴ A senior pastor’s role in such a church is to be the visionary leader,¹¹⁵ who pays the price by modeling cell ministry,¹¹⁶ who builds a staff that is involved in cell ministry,¹¹⁷ and who uses Sunday celebration services to promote cell ministry and to equip the saints to do cell ministry. In turn, the cell groups are where saints are shepherded and nurtured in following the Holy Spirit to minister to one another and mature as disciple-makers who work together to make disciples.¹¹⁸

111. Khong, *The Apostolic Cell Church*, 162.

112. Tay, “Cell Church in Singapore” in *Church Without Walls*, 8.

113. Beckham, “The Church with Two Wings,” in *Church Without Walls*, 26-39; see also Comiskey, *The Church that Multiplies*, 88-92, and Khong, *The Apostolic Cell Church*, 17-19, 32.

114. Khong, *The Apostolic Cell Church*, 102-103.

115. Khong, *The Apostolic Cell Church*, 103-104.

116. Comiskey, *The Church that Multiplies*, 53.

117. Comiskey, *The Church that Multiplies*, 90-92.

118. Comiskey, *The Church that Multiplies*, 113-116.

Cell Ministry, Building Projects, and Children's / Youth Ministry

Before deciding to transition to the cell-driven model, the elders of Grace Church Seattle desired to build a multi-purpose building with an emphasis of children's and youth ministry. During the process of recontextualization the question was raised: should we commit to a building project to support our children's ministry? This brings us back to the question of the necessity of a building to do ministry. Pastorally, David Platt would stress that buildings are not a bad thing in and of themselves, but that the leadership of local churches must put everything on the table and be willing to give up what is considered a good thing in order to redirect people and resources to do what God is calling *that* church to do. In making these decisions the focus should be more on people and less on places.¹¹⁹ Platt said someone might object and say, "What's wrong with constructing church buildings? Nowhere does the new Testament say we shouldn't construct buildings."¹²⁰ To which he responds,

But that's just it. There's also nothing in the New Testament that says we should construct church buildings. So whenever we plant a church or whenever a church starts to grow, why is the first thing we think, we need to spend masses of our resources on a building? Why would we spend an inordinate amount of our resources on something that is never prescribed or even encouraged in the New Testament? Why would we not instead use those resources on that which is explicitly promoted in the New Testament, such as sharing the gospel with the lost or helping the poor in the church? As I write this, more than seven hundred million people around the world live in slums. Many of them are our brothers and sisters in Christ. Should we really be prioritizing bigger buildings for ourselves?¹²¹

Reading the above causes two responses in me: first, one of conviction because I feel the Spirit whisper to my soul that Platt is right. And second, one of nervousness because of what this could mean for Grace Church Seattle. We have about \$900,000 sitting in the bank because of the combination of good stewardship and the sale of a Grace Church-owned property. And so our leadership is asking what we are called to do

119. Platt, *Radical Together*, 61-63.

120. Platt, *Radical Together*, 61.

121. Platt, *Radical Together*, 61-62.

with this money: the vision has been to build a gym with a kitchen and classroom space for youth and children's ministry, but is this the best use of resources? Is this what is needed to do children's and youth ministry effectively in the Seattle area? If I were to ask these questions of Platt, Putman, and Neighbour I believe their counsel will be as follows.

First, in consulting Platt I expect he would ask questions to make sure our leadership understands the gospel and the authority of Scripture as it relates to making disciples and having a global vision for the Great Commission.¹²² Next, he would recommend that I walk our leadership through a series of questions similar to what he asked of his own leadership team in the recontextualization process of his church to become missional:

- How can we most effectively mobilize the people of this church to accomplish the Great Commission?
- How can we most effectively organize the leadership of this church to accomplish the Great Commission?
- Do we need all the staff, teams, and committees we have?
- Does our church budget reflect the desire and design of God in his Word?
- Are our multimillion-dollar facilities the best use of our money for the accomplishment of God's purposes in the world?
- Are all the programs we have created the absolute best way to advance the gospel from our community to the ends of the earth?
- What good things do we have or what good things are we doing that need to abolish or alter for greater ends?¹²³

These questions may provoke pushback at Grace Church. People don't like it when the effectiveness of a program or ministry they have an affinity for is questioned. The reason, Platt would explain, is because in a program-driven church many of the programs are doing good things. And so people will disagree until they prayerfully contemplate as a team, "Are these programs and activities the best way to spend our time, money, and energy for the spread of the gospel in our neighborhood and in all

122. Platt, *Radical Together*, 25-46.

123. Platt, *Radical Together*, 12-13.

nations?”¹²⁴ For the leadership of Brook Hills Church, when this question was honestly engaged by the leadership through *prayer*, they found themselves being “...open to letting go of good things in order to achieve greater purposes. Our perspective had radically changed.”¹²⁵

As Platt tells the story of Brook Hills Church, it was budget season when the leadership began to look at finances through the lens of God’s greater purposes (specifically in how to apply James 2 in light of the Great Commission to go to the ends of the earth). When they realized that 41 percent of the world’s poor live in India, they chose to reorient the priorities of their budget to give as much money away as they could to local churches in India. Platt realized the impact of these decisions when he and his family were on their way home from church and one of his children said they didn’t have goldfish crackers that day in Sunday school. His wife said it was “daddy’s fault” and Platt didn’t know if he should laugh or hide. He realized the entire church was being affected from the leadership to the preschoolers.¹²⁶ And so the leadership put forth a proposal to Brook Hills Church family,

In love to God, in light of the needs around the world, and in obedience to Scripture (Proverbs 14:31; 21:13; 28:27; Matthew 25:31-46; James 2:14-17; 1 John 3:16-18), the leadership of the Church at Brook Hills proposes that the church body affirm the following actions:

- We will immediately begin radical saving as a church during the remainder of 2009 for the sake of urgent spiritual and physical need around the world.
- Our leadership will work together over the next two months on a 2010 budget that saves every expenditure possible for the sake of urgent spiritual and physical need around the world.
- We will immediately designate up to \$525,000 of our current excess cash to serve impoverished churches across India.¹²⁷

When I read this I was impacted. I believe something like this would be the right course of action for the leadership of Grace Church. We don’t need a gym to do

124. David Platt, *Radical Together*, 13.

125. David Platt, *Radical Together*, 14.

126. David Platt, *Radical Together*, 18.

127. David Platt, *Radical Together*, 18.

children's and youth ministry. And since our leadership has decided we are transitioning from programs to the cell-group model, it would make sense to put everything on the table and reorient how we do children's and youth ministry to be in line with our new missional and cell-driven methodology.

Second, if I were to ask Jim Putman what he would do to transition from a program model to a small group model, he would speak of the necessity of alignment. He uses the illustration of a pastor having three different people come up to him on a Sunday and volunteer to start three different ministries. Each of these people is well-meaning, but each of these ministries takes time, energy, money, and people resources to run with excellence. Jim said, "...it's easy to start up a smorgasbord of ministries and go a hundred different directions at once."¹²⁸ But he points out misalignment actually works against the effectiveness of the local church. People put time and energy into ministry without any sense of a clear purpose and ministers begin operating in isolation.¹²⁹ He continues, "Having a lot of unconnected programs in a church not only raises the question of effectiveness; it also creates a quality problem... It's far easier to do fewer things well than to do a lot of things haphazardly. Having a lot of unconnected ministries creates energy and staffing problems. ...having too many programs dilutes the mix of competent leadership."¹³⁰ I agree with his assessment of program-driven churches, especially his final point that it, "...becomes hard to sustain a large number of programs over the long haul. The original leaders get tired and drop out... The people coming to the programs and participating get tired too. People get overwhelmed with the number of activities they engage in. The whole process becomes hard to reproduce

128. Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington, with Robert E. Coleman, *DiscipleShift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 170.

129. Putman and Harrington, *DiscipleShift*, 172.

130. Putman and Harrington, *DiscipleShift*, 173.

season after season.”¹³¹ What has just been described is the reality I have experienced at multiple churches and specifically at Grace Church Seattle. If I were to ask Putman to evaluate our church and make recommendations, I believe he would say: (1) you need to evaluate every program to see if Jesus’ values of making disciples are at the core; (2) align every program with the overall goal of making disciples in relational contexts (i.e., small groups); and (3) simplify by doing less, with excellence.¹³²

Putman’s recommendations do not explicitly talk about children’s and youth ministry, but these ministries make up the bulk of our programs at Grace Church and so his recommendations are relevant. Putman’s chapter on alignment was at the center of conversation during a Grace elder and pastor retreat in May 2015. To summarize, years of tension for the staff in recruiting-efforts to run programs came to a head that winter as our youth and children’s pastors both ended up in the ER with stress related symptoms. I had let the stress level of running too many programs continue for too long. So our elders and pastors diagnosed the problem and created a solution. We read *DiscipleShift* in preparation for the retreat. We first concluded our church had been misaligned with too much going on, and so we decided to simplify, focusing on: Sunday worship, Wednesday children’s and youth ministry, and Home Communities (cells). Second, we needed to spend the coming years transitioning our children’s and youth ministry to viable cell-driven model. But what would this look like? For a solution I turned to Platt, Neighbour, and Comiskey to discover their thoughts on the matter.

Generally speaking, Platt emphasizes every Christian is called to make disciples.¹³³ He agrees with Coleman’s description of Jesus’ method of ministry carried out by the Apostles in *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (see above) and *The Master Plan*

131. Putman and Harrington, *DiscipleShift*, 173.

132. Putman and Harrington, *DiscipleShift*, 171, 173.

133. Platt, *Radical*, 87-106.

of Discipleship.¹³⁴ More specifically Platt says, “One of the unintended consequences of contemporary church strategies that revolve around performances, places, programs, and professionals is that somewhere along the way people get left out of the picture. But according to Jesus, people are God’s method for winning the world to himself.”¹³⁵ And so as Platt explains in *Radical Together*, when ministry is redefined in terms of relationships (focusing on people and making disciples in small group relational contexts) this leads to rethinking the importance of programs in ministry.¹³⁶ He says, “Imagine that your church had no building or facilities whatsoever. Could you still make disciples? Certainly the answer is yes. Churches all around the world make do. So how would your church make disciples completely separate from a church building?”¹³⁷ This is a great question, especially in relation to children and youth.

The vision of Grace is to build Christ-centered family in missional community. But how do we accomplish this task? The leadership of Grace values parents being the primary disciple-makers of their own children with church leaders being secondary. But many Christian parents in America see the children’s or youth pastor as their child’s primary shepherd, thus abdicating their responsibility as parents to make disciples of their own children. Since this is their expectation, many programs of churches have focused on putting the pastor on center stage or using a pre-packed discipleship program.¹³⁸ But is this method actually producing disciple-makers? Or is this just transferring information to the minds of students while neglecting the heart? What about ministry to children or teens in small group settings? What about involving them in ministry to one another? What about involving parents in shepherding their own children in Jesus’ method (cf. Deuteronomy 6:6-7 and Matthew 28:19-20)?

134. Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Spire, 1998), 12-13.

135. Platt, *Radical*, 90.

136. Platt, *Radical Together*, 63-64.

137. Platt, *Radical Together*, 64.

138. Brian Haynes, *Shift: What it Takes to Finally Reach Families Today* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2009), 36-39.

Children's and Youth Ministry in a Cell-Group Church

Platt tells the story of his church hosting a Vacation Bible School (VBS, a one week outreach and discipleship program for children during summer) every year at the church building. This takes a tremendous amount of time and energy to recruit, train, decorate, and coordinate everything to pull off the evangelism and discipleship event. Then the children's minister asked what this could look like if they didn't have a building? And so they started equipping parents, children's ministry leaders, and small group leaders to host Bible clubs in homes based in neighborhoods where the people live. Platt asks the question and makes the point, "Why not invite people from our neighborhoods, not to go to a church building with us, but to come across the street and into our homes with us? Home is where we could show the gospel to their children while we also shared life with them."¹³⁹ This seems a plausible alternative.

One of the greatest struggles for my wife and our friends concerning involvement in VBS is we have to rearrange schedules. The event itself is fun for kids, but the ministry competes with work, vacations, sports, camps, HCs, and often doesn't seem to have a long-term impact. But if an individual or group or Home Community chose to put on some kind of children's outreach in their neighborhood, then they could do ministry in their own timing to reach the friends of their children (and possibly their parents) in their unique style. All that would be required is for leaders and helpers to go through a screening and training process by the children's pastor. For Platt's church, "Crowds of kids came—far more than we could ever have hosted in our church building at one time. And it all took place in diverse neighborhoods far away from our building."¹⁴⁰

This not only positively affected children's ministry at Brook Hills, it also created the opportunity for parents to missionally reach out to other parents. Platt said he visited

139. Platt, *Radical Together*, 64.

140. Platt, *Radical Together*, 64-65.

one of these Bible clubs during the summer and the host couple made a proposal, “We were thinking that we could invite these kids and their families to our home throughout the year. We’d be doing ministry here instead of trying to do it all at the church building on a Wednesday night. Would that be okay with you?”¹⁴¹ Ten years ago I would have said no. My rationale would have been, “Wednesday night is designed for that purpose. What will become of our AWANA program if parents just do their own thing? We could really use your help with AWANA.” But now I would be more open to the idea for three reasons. First, this is not about me and my success at implementing or maintaining a program. I know Vanderstelt would have challenged me ten years ago by telling me I was defining the word “church” wrongly as an event or program done at a church building instead of being seen, “...as the people of God doing the work of God in everyday life.”¹⁴² I heard him say something similar at a conference in 2006 and my ministry perspective has shifted focus since. A second reason I would be more open to people doing children’s ministry in their homes is because I think they could reach different children (and their parents) than Grace Church could reach by simply running a program at the church building. Third, as the pastors of Grace we would be focusing on our calling, “*to equip* the saints to do ministry” and our congregants would be focusing on their calling to be equipped “*to do* ministry” (cf. Eph. 4:11-16).

Platt’s illustration was about summer activities with one family uniquely continuing the ministry. But what could this look like to change the culture of an entire program-driven church to become a cell-group church? Ralph Neighbour Jr. suggests two possible ways to make changes. The first is what Platt is describing: transition children’s and youth ministry into multiple homes for the express purpose of ministering to children, teens, their friends and families. This kind of cell-group is what Comiskey

141. Platt, *Radical Together*, 65.

142. Vanderstelt, *Saturate*, 24.

calls “intergenerational” groups.¹⁴³ The benefit of this kind of cell-meeting is families would form a bond in multigenerational community. Both Comiskey and Neighbour would argue there are a few different ways this could be done. One is to involve children with the adults the entire time, letting children learn by being set in the midst of the community.¹⁴⁴ We see in Matthew 19:14 that Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” Neighbour refers to Deuteronomy 6:4-8 as the Scriptural prescription for children’s religious education. He says, “...there was the unplanned and unintentional modeling by the people who shared the child’s world.”¹⁴⁵ Lowery and McCallum would interject here and say this is not only true for parents who educate their children, but that modelling is essential for organic disciple-making of adults as well, according to the Scriptures (e.g., Philippians 4:9; 1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7, 8).¹⁴⁶ Back to Neighbour’s point that a child needs to be set in the midst of community,

*That’s where children belong—in the midst of the learning community of God [italics in original]. They have two reasons for being there. First, they will learn best if they are in the midst of a vital community of faith. Second, the community needs to see the children visibly in their midst as a reminder of the nature of the Kingdom and their own attitude within it. The child is a living visual aid to the whole church.*¹⁴⁷

While I like the idea of including children with the adults in a cell meeting, by experience I do not believe this is as beneficial for adults when children are present the entire time. Neighbour’s response would be to read *He Set A Child In The Midst* by Lorna Jenkins, in which she describes a few ways this kind of ministry can be done in the home context. The children of parents in a cell-group can meet at the same time as the adults, but separately in another room or another home (this limits distractions). Or

143. Joel Comiskey, *Children in Cell Ministry: Discipling the Future Generation Now* (Moreno Valley, CA: CCS Publishing, 2016), 67-89.

144. Lorna Jenkins, “Children in Cell Churches,” in *Where Do We Go From Here?* by Neighbour Jr., 184-192.

145. Jenkins, “Children in Cell Churches,” in *Where Do We Go From Here?* by Neighbour Jr., 184.

146. McCallum and Lowery, *Organic Discipleship*, 70-71.

147. Jenkins, “Children in Cell Churches,” in *Where Do We Go From Here?* by Neighbour Jr., 189.

the adults could include the children during a portion of the cell-meeting and have the children do an activity in a separate room while the adults share more deeply.¹⁴⁸

For the entire church there is a second way of doing cell-group ministry according to Neighbour and Jenkins. In her dissertation for her Doctor of Ministry degree at Columbia Biblical Seminary, Jenkins suggests the current children's ministry could be recontextualized to be run as cell-ministry. Jenkin says,

It can be claimed that children already meet in small groups in the church when they attend Sunday School. They do indeed meet in small groups, graded according to age and with a teacher/leader to guide them. The difference is one of attitude and style, rather than obvious structural differences. A good Sunday school teacher can create a small group within a class. The same effect can also be achieved in a neighborhood Bible club, or with more difficulty, a Vacation Bible School. Yet in most cases it does not happen—not because teachers do not want to meet the relational needs of their children, but usually because they are unaware of the children's life experiences and do not have time to discuss them.¹⁴⁹

This caused me to rethink cell-driven ministry. My greatest struggle in transitioning our church to the cell model has been the feeling that a children's program, such as Sunday school or AWANA, is necessary to do children's ministry effectively. But as has been seen in *Radical Together* this is not always the case. Neighbour and Jenkins also suggest that cell groups do not need to fit a particular mold, rather there is flexibility. What is important, as Putman would say, is to align ministries to funnel "...people toward these discipleship environments, the most notable of which is the relational small group."¹⁵⁰ Small groups can happen within the context of a classroom, house, fellowship hall, Sunday school or AWANA program. Jenkins says the bottom line in, "...churches where small groups are the basic growing units for the adult congregations, the children need the same context for growth, a place to find peer

148. Lorna Jenkins, "He Set A Child In The Midst," in *Where Do We Go From Here?* by Neighbour Jr., 297-301.

149. Jenkins, "He Set A Child In The Midst," in *Where Do We Go From Here?* by Neighbour Jr., 268-269.

150. Putman and Harrington, *DiscipleShift*, 171.

acceptance within their spiritual family.”¹⁵¹ And she would add adults need to foster these kinds of relational environments for children to learn and to grow in Christ.

Not every child learns in the same way. Some children thrive in a classroom setting. But Jenkins points out some children find it boring when the teacher is the only source of information, which puts pressure on the teacher to make interesting what some children already know.¹⁵² Additionally she says,

In the schools, competition is regarded as a desirable incentive to motivate children to greater efforts. While this does work, it also acts in reverse. Some children feel they will *never* be able to succeed, and they lose heart. Often they feel resentment against children who succeed and children who win. At the same time, those who excel feel an undue superiority over children who fail. The relationships become rivalries instead of friendships. The winners have to maintain their status at all costs, and losers withdraw or find less acceptable ways of winning attention.¹⁵³

In reading this I thought of how ministry is done in the AWANA program. The incentive for children to come, to bring a friend, to memorize scripture, or to play the AWANA games is a reward system. I have a hard time with this because while children learn scripture, they may do it for wrong motives and there is little discussion of how the scripture relates to the heart, to attitudes, and to the real lives of children. And what about involving them in ministering to one another? I believe Neighbour, Jenkins, and Putman would agree and recommend churches change their style of teaching children to engage their hearts and hands as well as their heads.

To recontextualize a children’s ministry from program and lecture style to a cell-group ministry, Jenkins suggests, “Children’s small groups...should be designed to fulfill all the functions of adult small groups... The people who lead them will be group leaders more than teachers, and they will shape their ministry on the model of kinship.”¹⁵⁴

Jenkins explains that in a healthy family context children work out problems, they can

151. Lorna Jenkins, “Children’s Cell Groups,” in *Where Do We Go From Here?* by Neighbour Jr., 268.

152. Jenkins, “Children’s Cell Groups,” in *Where Do We Go From Here?* by Neighbour Jr., 277.

153. Jenkins, “Children’s Cell Groups,” in *Where Do We Go From Here?* by Neighbour Jr., 270-271.

154. Jenkins, “Children’s Cell Groups,” in *Where Do We Go From Here?* by Neighbour Jr., 269.

express anger and hurt, and they learn to forgive and encourage one another while keeping confidences. Leading a group in this way creates an uplifting relational environment for everyone to participate and within which everyone can grow. In a children's cell-group the leader should allow give and take, playing the role of facilitator to shepherd the group to learn to use their spiritual gifts to minister to one another in community. To do this, Jenkins recommends a mix of ages to allow older children to model Christianity and explain things to younger children.¹⁵⁵

Logistically speaking, since AWANA or Sunday school can be repurposed to become a cell-group ministry, what is yet required is creating the right environment. There can be a large group time for games and worship, but then a small group time of about eight children, a leader and an apprentice who shepherd the hearts of children by stimulating a discussion about how to apply the scripture or story of the day to real life. The room in which the children meet should not look like a classroom, but rather feel more like a living room with couches or pillows on the floor so leaders can get down on an equal playing field with the children to open up dialogue.¹⁵⁶ Two other points of Jenkins' I agree with (and that our Grace Church Children's Pastor and I will try to implement) is storytelling and spontaneous prayer. Adults do not always need to be the ones who tell the biblical story. Children can do this as well. Jenkins says, "Again, the atmosphere of the story telling will be based on the family model, not the school model."¹⁵⁷ Jenkins stresses prayer should not be formal and should not only come from the leader. Rather prayer needs to be spontaneous, informal, coming from the heart, and done by the children as well as the adults.¹⁵⁸

155. Jenkins, "Children's Cell Groups," in *Where Do We Go From Here?* by Neighbour Jr., 269-293.

156. Jenkins, "Children's Cell Groups," in *Where Do We Go From Here?* by Neighbour Jr., 287-288.

157. Jenkins, "Children's Cell Groups," in *Where Do We Go From Here?* by Neighbour Jr., 290.

158. Jenkins, "Children's Cell Groups," in *Where Do We Go From Here?* by Neighbour Jr., 290-291.

Finally, Jenkins would say children need a covenant of agreement produced by the children between the children and the leader so that they take ownership in areas such as, "...attendance, sharing, keeping confidences, taking turns, dealing with obstructive behavior, praying for each other, and caring for each other."¹⁵⁹ Jenkins adds this can make discipline much easier to carry through.

The Need for Outside Consultation for *How to Transition*

I agree, for the most part, with Neighbour and Jenkins that children should be involved in cell-groups if the rest of the church is transitioning in this direction. My one caution is if Grace Church ended our AWANA program and did children's ministry only through Sunday school and Home Community groups, then I believe we would see an immediate and significant drop off in attendance and involvement in our church. This leads to several questions addressed in the following chapter through interviews of those who have experience leading a church through a similar transition. My questions will focus on leader development and specifically about how to do children's ministry in an intergenerational cell-group. Some specific questions addressed will be: how to determine which programs to keep and which ones to cut? How quickly to make this transition? How does a pastor develop a children's and youth ministry in cell groups with adults? And finally, is there an advantage to developing some kind of hybrid of cell and program? For example, should our church end our current AWANA program (requiring 48 adult volunteers) and instead develop a children's cell and celebration meeting at the building with one third the volunteers? My interviews that follow are of Steve Timmis, Joel Comiskey, Dan Braga, and Jeff Vandersteldt all of whom have successfully coached or led a church through transition to become a missional and cell-group church.

159. Jenkins, "Children's Cell Groups," in *Where Do We Go From Here?* by Neighbour Jr., 287.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT DESIGN

Introduction: Interviews with Four Pastors / Consultants

To transition a programmed and attractional events-driven church into a cell-driven church, solid coaching from experienced pastors becomes necessary. I conducted four semi-formal interviews to prepare and help solve some of the problems and challenges Grace Church leadership has faced during its own transition. The project's questions, which follow, are designed to help pastors and ministry leaders in general to think through a strategy for moving forward with the least amount of fall-out along with maximum buy-in from the leadership and their church members.

The first pastor I interviewed was Steve Timmis, Executive Director of Acts 29 and Senior Elder at the Crowded House in Sheffield, England.¹ He is author of many books, including *Total Church* and *Everyday Church*, cited in chapters one and three. The second pastor I interviewed was Dan Braga, Lead Pastor at Taproot Church in Burien, Washington and member of the Acts 29 church-planting network.² The third pastor I interviewed was Joel Comiskey of the Joel Comiskey Group, who is currently a cell-group coach and author living in Northern California.³ Comiskey has written several works, quoted in chapters one through three. The final pastor I interviewed was Jeff Vanderstelt, formerly of Soma Tacoma, and current Lead Teaching Pastor at Doxa Church in Bellevue, Washington; he authored *Saturate*.⁴ These pastors were carefully chosen given that I have already learned and applied much from their works.

1. Steve Timmis, interview by author, Seattle, March 14, 2016, recorded on iPhone, transcript in Appendix B.

2. Dan Braga, interview by author, Burien, WA June 20, 2016, recorded on iPhone, transcript in Appendix C.

3. Joel Comiskey, interview by author, via Zoom, Seattle, July 6, 2016, recorded on iPhone, transcript in Appendix D.

4. Jeff Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016, recorded on iPhone, transcript in Appendix E.

The First Set of Questions

The base-line questions used for each semi-formal interview are provided in Appendix A, along with the transcripts of each interview in Appendices B, C, D, and E. The core intent of the first six questions asked was to understand each of the pastor's contexts of ministry; their experience with program and events-driven ministry; their passion and motivation for transitioning from the events or the program-driven model to a cell or missional-community model of church; and to comprehend the biblical or theological basis for their shift in methodology. I wanted to know their stories, any pushback they may have received as they transitioned out of a fairly traditional model of church, and to discover their successes from which to glean from their experience and wisdom. Essentially I was trying to understand their philosophy of church and how this could work in the twenty-first century Western world.

Their Passion and Motivation for Ministry

Steve Timmis is more or less the most senior of the four interviewees, with a great deal of experience in the program-driven church. He is a pioneer of the Missional Community method of church in the Western secular context from the late twentieth to the early twenty-first century. He has been a Christian for 48 years and spent the "best part of 36 years" in a fairly traditional model of ministry by British standards. His passion and motivation to develop more of an everyday Christian community sprang:

...from the gospel and the fame of Jesus...*that really is the case for me* and I often talk about the Crowded House as being first and foremost a gospel initiative ...it's not a model of church, it's not some kind of clever initiative...it's been about the best way to reach people for Jesus. ...that's really my passion and motivation.⁵

Similarly, Dan Braga believes, "...that the Church is the inbreaking of God's Kingdom in the world, it's the hope of what humanity will be when the King returns, and

5. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

we are the *bear-ers* of good news, the gospel of Jesus; that Christ is risen from the dead, the hope of humanity is in the name of Christ, in Christ alone.”⁶

Jeff Vanderstelt pointed to the love of the Father seen through the sending of His Son as his primary motivation. His passion for ministry is “to see Christ glorified in the Puget Sound, saturated with the gospel. ...where every man, woman, child has a daily encounter with Jesus in word and deed.”⁷ His belief is that the church is supposed to initiate gospel saturation as a community in the everyday stuff of life, “not just primarily on the Sunday event or on a Wednesday or small group.”⁸ Thus his goal is to equip and mobilize the church to fill this world with the knowledge and the glory of God, motivated by the love and passion for the glory of Christ.⁹

Joel Comiskey’s passion for starting cell-groups in Ecuador was rooted in making disciples through cell ministry and church planting. He believes this is the essence of Jesus’ method of ministry from the beginning: making disciples *in a group* and sending them forth *as a group* to continue the disciple-making process, which is the summary-intent of the four Gospels and the Great Commission. Comiskey explained this is counter to the Western mindset, which tends to emphasize individual discipleship.¹⁰

I could immediately tell why these men are effective in their ministry to reach unbelievers in postmodern and secular cities where the light of Christ is dim, and where truth is questioned from all angles: they are passionate communicators with deep conviction. These men believe mission and the apologetic of community seen within the church is the platform from which to communicate the gospel to a lost world. By living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ in small group communities together, the light of Jesus can be observed by skeptical onlookers.

6. Braga, interview by author, Burien, Washington, June 20, 2016.

7. Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016.

8. Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016.

9. Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016.

10. Comiskey, interview by author, via Zoom, Seattle, July 6, 2016.

Stories of Transition from Programs to Small Groups

I shared Vanderstelt's story in chapters one and three; my impression from the interview is he really cares deeply about "making disciples who make disciples," which was a phrase he repeated throughout the interview. In his current setting, he is transitioning what was the Mars Hill congregation (that met on the campus where Mark Driscoll preached) into a community of disciples who make disciples. Inferring from the interview, he would say Mars Hill was more of a program and attractional events-driven ministry than a Missional Community of disciple-makers who knew how to make disciples. Vanderstelt describes the people's reaction and push back at his new church, as congregants began to realize what he was training them to do,

I think because Mark beat the drum about reaching the lost so much, mission was in the DNA of the church...but the people didn't necessarily know how to personally be on mission. ...so when I stepped in and said, "I want to equip you to be the disciples who make disciples," ...there was an open reception but a kind of...ignorance... Then as I started to lay it out...using language like, "You don't go to church, you are the church," "Church is not a Sunday event but a 24-7 people," ...they would say, "This is overwhelming because you're saying all of our life...is... basically meant to be ministry and mission." And I would have to correct that and say, "Well, I didn't make that up, that was already true before you knew it. Before I said it... That's always been the case, you were bought with a price, Jesus' very life given for you, and you are not your own, therefore everything is His. All of your life was meant to be for His glory and...purpose."¹¹

The pushback Vanderstelt experienced had to do with a conditioned perspective that ministry only happens during scheduled church time on Sundays or Wednesdays and that the rest of life is about freedom to do what one wants. Vanderstelt counters this by explaining God has always been at work in the lives of His people, even when they didn't realize or were not intentionally engaging in it. And so Vanderstelt would correct the misperception of compartmentalized living, and explain that missional living is about partnering with God to minister to people in already existing activities and relationships. He would say to those feeling overwhelmed at the thought of missional living, "...this

11. Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016.

shouldn't feel like a bigger burden, this should feel like you just got empowered to step into the life He's already given you and doing work through you, not just inviting Him to join...to give you the power and the awareness to join Him in doing His work."¹²

Steve Timmis has described a similar, yet different reaction from people when he first tried to transition to a new form of ministry methodology. When I asked him about the resistance he faced from peers or people in his church he said,

There's quite a bit of pushback and misunderstanding from peers. Yeah, they just thought it was a little bit, kinda crazy, a bit kooky... And people were afraid of...heresy...developing because you didn't have the kind of formal constraints, the church institutional weight...to kinda keep it on its track. ...so there was quite a bit of misunderstanding...and suspicion...a kind of patronizing indulgence...

And in terms of the...first church, I didn't transition them well. I changed...the structures. I changed the practices, but I didn't transition it. So when I left, everything went back to how it was. ...people changed because they liked me, they respected me...the church was growing...people were being saved, so, they weren't gonna argue it, but they were never persuaded. So when we took over the...[Crowded House]...I was a lot more considerate in how I transitioned it¹³

I agree with what some of his peers were saying, especially the fear of theological heresy by leaders of small groups. Yet, while I agree theological constraints from the institutional church need to exist, I have noticed Millennials (and to a lesser extent Generation X) are skeptical and untrusting of institutional authority. Therefore, it seems they don't care to place themselves under the formal constraints of a church, and so Western church leaders face a dilemma, a crossroads. How does an established church pass on good theology to the next generation without losing the next generation because it is too controlling? How do pastors create a multigenerational and missional church that bridges all generations together? I believe evangelical churches may lose the next generation if church leaders don't learn to communicate the "church institutional weight" in language that is palatable to a) the "churched" of the next generation, b) the "unchurched" of our culture, and c) the "dechurched" that have already abandoned

12. Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016.

13. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

institutionalized religion because of negative church experiences. This issue of generational communication gaps is a major motivating factor for me as to why I will attempt to transition any church I am a part of from programs to missional Home Communities. I have a passion for the local church, for it being multi-generational, and for all its members reaching people for Christ as teams making disciples.

Dan Braga is a relatively unknown pastor, but he is one who has accomplished much of what I am seeking to do at Grace Church Seattle, and his church is ten minutes away in Burien, Washington. Braga is somewhat of an understudy to Vanderstelt and Timmis. He has a great mind and an impressive depth of knowledge and understanding of Scripture, theology, and philosophy for someone who does not yet have a degree (at the time of this work he was working on an MDiv equivalent through Western Seminary). I chose to interview him because of his success in transitioning a long established church from programs to a cell-group like model.

Dan Braga's story of transition of Taproot Church is radical; he actually went through a process of convincing his church to sell their church building, with a poor location in the woods, to move into the city center of Burien to be fully immersed in a strategic location as a missional community (cell) church. I asked Dan Braga, "When you made your decision to change your method of ministry from the program, events-driven...to...missional communities...what resistance if any did you face from peers or those in your church or organization?" Braga responded,

I had envisioned and planned...to plant a church from scratch and I ended up re-planting a church...they brought me on unanimously saying basically do whatever you wanna do. And they were, in essence, a very dysfunctional missional community. There was about thirty of them and the relational ties were about thirty years old. ...the pressure that I faced was when we began to add new people, and those relational dynamics changed, to where this co-dependent, insular, kinda inward-focused community of people that had been together for three decades was now being broken up by other relationships. That was surprising to them, though they wanted that...the decision we had to make to bring about growth...really upset people. ... I wasn't very diplomatic in the early days, and I wasn't very democratic, and I don't want to say that I was

authoritarian or autocratic, but they brought me on to lead and make change and I was making changes, and...it was an emotional train wreck. I told [them] it was like being in a funeral parlor watching the death of a church and being in a labor room watching the birth of a church at the exact same time...¹⁴

For clarity, I asked him to explain what it was like going through that process, and to share his motivation for selling the building. He said,

Oh, the process was terrible and the most sanctifying thing I've ever been through... This little insular, ingrown community of people based their whole life and ministry success on the fact that they had this little building that they had bought and paid for...and now just lived in, and [were] dying in, that's what they were doing. So my motivation was to literally break them out of their self-made coffin... And my second motivation was we, like Paul, wanted to be right in the center of where this little small bit of culture was being made. Burien has its own culture and it's coming out of where all these pubs and restaurants and condos are coming in, we wanted to be right in the center of all of that to influence it and shape it and be part of it. The process is what literally almost broke our church in 2012, when we finally sold the property there was a massive...bomb that went off. We lost over a third of our people who I thought were with us...

...the budget tanked, and then we went through a whole year of dealing with accusations and questions and walking through repenting of mistakes that we had made as leaders, and also recognizing where we hadn't made mistakes and standing our ground...it was very difficult... But I will say this, on the record to anybody who re-plants a church, those are the fork-in-the-road decisions that if you make them, you'll survive, and you'll come through the other side... If you don't, you'll stay in that coffin. And I've watched guys do it.¹⁵

I was curious about the selling of their building; not that I believe God is calling Grace to sell its building, but I do believe, like Braga, that the building of Grace is a symbol of the success from the 1980s, when the church had a "come and see" mentality, rather than an "equip and send" methodology. But it's a new day: no longer can missionaries or pastors of churches in many cities in the West expect people to come to us, we Christians need to go to the unchurched, in their context, and win the unchurched as small groups of communities seeking to be under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Braga understands this, and so concerning his motivation to sell the building he said,

Western Christianity worships the idol of security and comfort. Because we're affluent and we don't understand risk; we don't understand eternal values. And I

14. Braga, interview by author, Burien, Washington, June 20, 2016.

15. Braga, interview by author, Burien, Washington, June 20, 2016.

had to rip off that, that band-aide with that building down there, and at this point it's still been difficult, but God has used it.

And...we live under the false idea that we are secure. And people associate that with financial stability and "building" stability in the church, and...there's truth in that, but not to the degree that Christians should carry it to. We're to be an unstable needy people, and if we're not needy, if we're stable...that's our death, that's not Christianity.¹⁶

Braga is bluntly calling out Christians who are comfortable, who rest in their laurels, and who are not about current kingdom work. To call out Christians (especially the leaders) in this way is very risky for a pastor to do. So I asked him, "...as a leader, how did you navigate these waters and keep your church organization from sinking? What mistakes did you make? What did you do well?" To which Braga responded,

...to be frank...I didn't think we were gonna make it through. ...And so I just kept putting one foot in front of the other, after 2012 all the way to 2013. And it was one conversation after another...letting people leave, letting people ask questions. And we had to let it all finally shake out, and those that stayed, they stayed because they trusted us. ...those that left, didn't trust us. They didn't wanna follow the vision that we were presenting. And we had to just buckle down and say, "If this is God's, and this is really what He wants, then we'll survive this..." If it's not, I had to relinquish control and say, "Okay, we made a mistake. This little church died and now I gotta find out what God wants next."

What mistakes did we make? ...the particular...individuals that spearheaded the division, when they really started showing their teeth, I did not courageously call that out publically the way I should have. And it caused more devastation. We should have been more bold...simply stating...these people are acting divisively and slanderously rather than humbly obeying Scripture. I was a young leader and I hadn't faced that much intense pressure, I was in my early thirties dealing with men...in their sixties...it was...scary...to have to publically call out people like that that had so much power, and so much respect, and I didn't do it. And...that didn't help us, and to this day there are still unresolved questions for people... And I've resolved never to do it again, when divisiveness like that...rises up, be biblical about it, mark people as divisive and trust God with the rest.

When you ask what we did well? ...we did stand our ground. We prayed...made the decision...this is the direction we're going, "We love you, we want you to go this direction, we're not trying to control you, we believe the Bible's compelling us to this." ...we didn't stop moving forward. And today that's bearing out fruit.¹⁷

16. Braga, interview by author, Burien, Washington, June 20, 2016.

17. Braga, interview by author, Burien, Washington, June 20, 2016.

I asked for clarity in what he meant by “stand our ground.” Was he talking about selling the building and moving to the city center or was he talking about the establishing of Missional Communities? Braga answered,

All of that and more. ...standing the ground saying, “Look, the relationships that you think are healthy, they’re not healthy, as far as the New Testament is concerned,” which was very offensive to many people, but they needed to hear these things. If they don’t hear these things, and have somebody that will stand and lovingly say these things, or in my case sometimes not lovingly because I was young and made mistakes...they’ll die there. And I think we as pastors have the responsibility to lead them out.¹⁸

I further asked what he meant by “pastors have the responsibility to lead them out.” Specifically I was alluding to the pressure pastors sometimes feel (spoken or unspoken) that they are hired by a church to do a certain job, and when they don’t do it the way people or boards expect them to, power-struggles ensue, people leave, the budget takes a hit, and the pastor feels pressure to compromise or not really lead.

Braga understood my meaning and said,

I think that a pastor who wants to lead an initiative like moving a church from events-centered to missional community-centered has to have a semblance of entrepreneurialship and catalytic leadership. I think there are guys that are called to tend to a flock until the flock dies, which is a noble calling. And then I think there are guys that are called to transcend and transform flocks. And I think each has their respective role within the body of Christ... I have friends that are committed to being bi-vocational for the very thing that you just said...they won’t be tugged on by the financial strings. And then I have other friends that are like, “...I wanna respect that they are paying my salary and I wanna take my time with them, and I wanna lead them.” ...in my own situation I wasn’t paid by the church that I replanted for the first eighteen months, I raised all my own support. I hadn’t even really thought through that, it hadn’t even entered my mind...I was just obeying what God had called me to.¹⁹

I believe he’s right. Too often pastors start out in ministry making decisions based on prayer, the Spirit, and scripture, yet end up compromising because the pressure is high and they have a family to feed. But compromised leadership is likely to

18. Braga, interview by author, Burien, Washington, June 20, 2016.

19. Braga, interview by author, Burien, Washington, June 20, 2016.

be ineffective at making disciples in the long run, thus why Braga's ongoing ministry is inspiring.

I asked Braga about his Scriptural basis for his shift from programs to the Missional Community and cell-group model, to which he said, "...the Pauline Corpus, the New Testament in general, but particularly Paul's framing of his churches and the Book of Acts, Luke's account, historically the narrative lends itself to the way that we're framing up our ministries... framing up our churches, our church plants." I asked him if he had a particular Scripture in mind and he said,

No, but there's broad ideas, so, if you follow the trajectory of Acts, what you see Paul doing is planting in cultural hubs, first going to...a level one circle of influence being Jews in the Synagogue and then...branching out after rejection to a level two, which would be gentiles, a further distance between cultures...and then multiplying those under trained elders. And then returning to those churches...Luke uses a specific word *sterizo*, to strengthen those churches, to establish them...theologically under...elders. And Paul did that over and over and over, you're hard pressed not to take that pattern and just steady on with it.²⁰

Braga was specifically referring to Acts 14:21-26, where it speaks of Paul back-tracking his steps in Galatia by revisiting each church to appoint elders and strengthen the souls of believers so that they could continue a disciple-making ministry *without* depending on Paul being present. We know from reading the New Testament that he wrote the book of Galatians as a follow up, a form of discipleship to clarify the gospel, and to ensure they were on the right track. To me this speaks of the necessity of qualified ministers focusing on disciple-making in like manner. And this speaks to the necessity of the "church institutional weight" Timmis' detractors alluded to, as being a set of standards for qualified leaders who plant churches and lead small group ministries. I believe this is one point that each interviewee ultimately would concede to, and is one of the very purposes of their ministry, to equip and enable people to be more effective at disciple-making as Jesus and Paul did, within apostolic community.

20. Braga, interview by author, Burien, Washington, June 20, 2016.

Why Cell (Missional Communities) Versus Programs?

Braga is the one interviewee who did not grow up in a Christian context: he did not grow up in the church. He accepted Christ in his early twenties and was discipled to eventually become a Youth Pastor at a Calvary Chapel for seven years. His impression of his first church ministry experience is that it, "...was ministerially, methodologically, and philosophically completely centered around the Sunday gathering, preaching of the text, and events as a means of evangelism." He talked about how it is tempting to use this method of ministry, because it is easier, "...where you go to your program, your program does this and it produces this. That's great, and it's very tempting to bow to that. ...to want to do that. I just don't think it produces mature Christians."²¹

Vanderstelt said something similar when he realized the model of Willow Creek was developing anemic Christians who had "very little ability to walk out the commands of Jesus..."²² And so as a youth pastor of Willow Creek he decentralized the Youth Ministry and started training students in the everyday rhythms of life to share Christ with their friends and make disciples. But he observed that when they would graduate, they would be taught to sit in the pew while someone else did ministry, the passion would fade. Vanderstelt believes very strongly in attractional ministry when "Jesus formed in His people in all of life is the attraction."²³ Since he built this kind of environment in student ministry, he set out to do the same with adults at Soma and now Doxa.

Vanderstelt emphasized he is not necessarily "anti-program" if by program one means how to group people together for discipleship and mission. But he is "anti-the-program is the attraction." He believes this approach is developing "an anemic Christian." This is noteworthy because when Christians believe church is a worship service that they go to once per week and view the rest of life is about them, then Christ

21. Braga, interview by author, Burien, Washington, June 20, 2016.

22. Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016.

23. Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016.

will not be truly formed in them.²⁴ As Comiskey stated, Jesus emphasized communal discipleship whereby Christians utilize their spiritual gifts to edify one another to become mature followers of Christ.²⁵ And this requires a more intimate fellowship that meets regularly to learn in community how to submit to the Lordship of Jesus. Concerning programs versus small groups being utilized to make mature disciples, Braga said,

...if the church is based wholly on events, what that produces is an entrenched immaturity in the Christian community. When Paul talks about us being a body, and the nose and the ear and the eye and the hand having to do its job, in an event driven situation, only the mouthpiece and a few hands do the job, and everyone else comes and sits and listens. And there's salvation there...some beginnings of health, but maturing disciples are taking on responsibility in their own Christianity, in their own growth, and in an event-driven situation where your whole discipleship is to go, sit, listen, and watch, you're never doing anything. And that's the difference we see between...what I think is biblical discipleship, and the mega-church event...that happens now in the west.²⁶

Timmis believes what is important is not the model, but whether leadership uses the model to get people into relationships so Christ can work on them in community by doing "life-on-life" together leading to mission.²⁷ This is what each interviewee was after; gathering people in small groups to equip them to make disciple-makers together.

Comiskey is the only pastor of the four to officially call this kind of ministry the "cell-driven" model. He is a little more programmatic in his approach of how he develops cells, cell-leaders, and cell-churches. He believes it is imperative for a cell-driven ministry to develop groups based on a consistent definition of a cell, which he defines as, "...3-15 that meets [sic] weekly outside the church building for the purpose of evangelism, community, and spiritual growth, with the goal of making disciples who make disciples that results [sic] in multiplication."²⁸ What these groups are called is not what's important; Timmis calls them "Life Groups," Vanderstelt calls them "Missional

24. Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016.

25. Comiskey, interview by author, via Zoom, Seattle, July 6, 2016.

26. Braga, interview by author, Burien, Washington, June 20, 2016.

27. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

28. Comiskey, interview by author, via Zoom, Seattle, July 6, 2016.

Communities,” and Braga uses the term “Home Gatherings.” Braga once used Vanderstelt’s terminology, but Taproot switched from missional language because he felt the missional emphasis was becoming a new legalism that was wearing out the people of his church. About this change, Braga said he and his pastoral staff,

...made that decision theologically. ...we were hard pressed as we read Paul to find him praying for evangelists and mission in the New Testament community, we saw him constantly praying that they would know the love of God and love each other...we don’t see Paul praying, “God give them power for mission.” ...we had lengthy conversations about Missional Community, and if it was creating a legalistic pressure to tick off a box within our communities, versus a gospel motivation to go out and be the people of God in a community. So we said, “We gather on Sundays to hear the gospel, and we gather in homes to live the gospel, and mission flows out of that.”²⁹

He realizes this is, “...backwards in the Missional Community conversation.”³⁰

But I think Steve Timmis would affirm his convictions. Something Timmis described after the interview that I did not record, but which is an observation of his and which is pertinent to this discussion of how groups become missional, is he expressed there are four stages a group goes through to become a Missional Community. Stage one involves people meeting in a home to become a support group to one another, they just “hang out.” Stage two, the group begins to serve each other outside of their meetings, and they begin to serve the community together, they go “do something” as a group. Stage three, they become a team of missionaries (a team of individuals with convictions to be missional, but they are not yet working together with purpose). And finally, the group becomes a missionary team, doing “life-on-life together in mission” as they “develop a sense of cohesion and identity.”³¹

I believe Vanderstelt would affirm Braga’s and Timmis’ observation of the natural flow and development of a group. He describes similar stages, but is more purposeful in trying to bring them about. He sees the group as, “...a family of servant missionaries

29. Braga, interview by author, Burien, Washington, June 20, 2016.

30. Braga, interview by author, Burien, Washington, June 20, 2016.

31. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

sent to make disciples who make disciples...”³² And so for Vanderstelt, new Missional Communities walk through the *Saturate Field Guide*, which he wrote to equip groups to write a group covenant and to accomplish these three goals together (family, servants, and missionaries). After reading *Saturate* about a year ago, Grace Church Seattle has adopted this language in forming groups and using group covenants (see Appendix F).

What about a Sunday Gathering for Worship?

As I interviewed each pastor, I wanted to know if they believed Sunday worship gatherings are important and necessary. I sought to understand their purpose for gathering. Beginning with Timmis, after reading *Everyday Church* I was not entirely certain if the Crowded House had a Sunday gathering at a church building. So I asked him how they functionally did church, to which he said,

...when I started Crowded House, I started it as a vision to plant a network of household churches. And I remember famously saying...quite publically...it was a massive faux pas...I said, “If Crowded House ever has a building we’ll [have] sold our vision short.” ...four years later we had a building. And some people did suggest we sold the vision short, in fact somebody set up an email account for me that said Steve@soldout.com. ...it was a joke. ...I had been adamant at the beginning it was a gospel initiative, as the situation developed, and as the situation grew, this became a gospel opportunity that we...couldn’t refuse. And it was basically a dying church that asked us to...come in and take them over. ...and we felt an obligation to them as a group of elderly believers, godly, lovely, lovely men and women...”³³

And so they closed down one of their household churches and started meeting at this building by partnering with the church that was dying. Until that point, Timmis said their growth was slow. But since then the church has grown and multiplied church-plants with a “devolved” model of ministry that emphasizes the work of service ought to take place outside the church building and in the surrounding community.

32. Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016.

33. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

He answered the question if they had a building, but I was curious if this shifted their method of ministry, if they still had small group meetings in homes. He answered, "...yes, but you can't define them in terms of meetings. That's the question most people ask, but it's not essentially about a meeting at all. It's about doing "life-on-life together on mission."³⁴ I began to pick up a theme, a big idea he kept repeating; this was a kind of "melodic way" of communicating that he uses in order to draw people in and engage his ideas. But I was still unclear about how this all worked together, so I probed him further about his model of ministry, to which he said,

I will often refute any idea that this is a model of church, it really isn't....I'll say to pastors of mega churches, you know I don't have a beef with big churches, with mega churches, with giga-churches. ...but I do say to them for every church you've gotta find a way of structuring yourself so you're doing life-on-life together on mission. ...that's critical. So you can get thousands of people into a building on a Sunday ...but...the essence of it...is that which can flourish in any context, at any time, in any culture.³⁵

He continued by explaining that a cultural expression of church in Seattle might look different compared to a church in the middle of Riyadh, and that there is nothing wrong with different ways of doing church. But what's important is how a church structures and resources their efforts to do life-on-life together on mission, which he described as "the sharp pointy bit" of who Christians are. He declared the biblical basis for this goes back to Genesis and continues through Revelation. He explained that when Jesus sent out His disciples, it was "...about God having a people for Himself that He reveals His glory to, in the gospel, and He reveals His glory through the gospel in the life they live and the words that they speak."³⁶ For Timmis this is the most compelling argument for the mission of the church, and he pointed out that this coherent biblical message climaxes with the new creation. He stated the, "Church is far more dynamic, critical, glorious...and sophisticated than merely a meeting, or even primarily a meeting

34. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

35. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

36. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

in a particular location in a particular time. It's God's people living 'life-on-life together on mission.'"³⁷

I was still unclear if they meet weekly, so I asked if there was a benefit for home groups and Sunday gatherings to have a particular and regular time to meet. He said,

Yes...yes there is very much a benefit for that...we do it because it's a good idea to. On a Sunday morning we...run two meetings...it's a great occasion, I love the gathering of the church. We sing God's praises...we pray, we rehearse the gospel, the Bible is taught, people are equipped, people are engaged with one another...and it's a great time.

Would we still exist as a church if we were no longer able to do that because of persecution, and culturally, societal crackdown? Yes, of course we could. So is it essential that kind of public gathering? No! Is it helpful? Yes! Is it helpful to get the church on a smaller scale all together around a meal, and in a home? Of course, cause that's what they were doing in the New Testament. ...and you... even go back to the precursor of that in terms of Israel. ...and that's what Israel were doing, they were living life-on-life together. That's what the Law was meant to do, that's why...all 613 commands apply to the details of life, because it was about "life-on-life together on mission" as a light to the nations. ...and...the Church has taken...the fulfillment of that...and lives that out in...any context in which it finds itself. ...but gathering, itself, is an essential part of being church. But not necessarily a big gathering in a building, as helpful as that is in many cultural contexts.³⁸

This provides a coherent biblical theology of church, showing a consistency between the Old Testament and New, and showing that there is flexibility in how to structure Christian community. We each have a role to play in God's grand design of the local church, and that role is somewhat dictated by the needs of the community with a response by local churches that is culturally appropriate to that particular context.

To sum up, Timmis gave his reasoning as to why it is beneficial for Christians to gather regularly and underscored an important element of Sunday worship: to equip the saints to do mission. Braga and Vanderstelt would agree. Braga tells his people that on Sundays they are to, "Go be with the church... to hear the gospel, be fed the gospel.'

37. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

38. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

And our HGs, our Home Gatherings, ‘You gather...to live and be the gospel, to each other and to your community in community.’”³⁹ A bit later he fleshed this out saying,

...I would never want to disparage the Sunday event. We...philosophically say Sundays are for...the preaching of God’s word, corporate communion, and the celebration of the resurrection and song on the first day of the week. ...but we also dually emphasize...a Home Gathering, serving in some capacity at that Home Gathering, and at the Sunday gatherings. ...I don’t want to disparage doing some sort of event to draw people in, but it’s a bullet point, it’s not the point of the Church... So you have to...emphasize the relational nature of the church for it to be healthy, especially in the liberal Western context where we live.⁴⁰

Braga described Sundays and HGs as the main meals of Taproot, meant to nourish the body, everything else is a supplement to the main meals (by this he meant leader development, which I will explain later).⁴¹ I believe Vanderstelt would affirm Braga, as he also used a body analogy to make a similar point. He described the Sunday gatherings as being the heart, an essential organ that pumps blood through the rest of the body, “...that’s where I can speak vision, it’s where I can equip, it’s where we can experience the best equipping happening...in one place...”⁴² These pastors agree that Sunday worship and small group gatherings are both essential for disciple-making.

Of the four pastors, Comiskey’s structure of “cell, celebration, equipping and coaching”⁴³ is the most succinct. By *cell* he is referring to small groups. By *celebration* he means the Sunday worship gatherings of a congregation. By *equipping* he means one equipping but many ways to equip, through classes or personal investment from a trained and qualified leader, to help a disciple work through material to understand the basics of doctrine and practice in the Christian life and church. And finally, by *coaching*

39. Braga, interview by author, Burien, Washington, June 20, 2016.

40. Braga, interview by author, Burien, Washington, June 20, 2016.

41. Braga, interview by author, Burien, Washington, June 20, 2016.

42. Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016.

43. Comiskey, interview by author, via Zoom, Seattle, July 6, 2016.

Comiskey means shepherding and guidance of a cell leader by a coach with experience to help the cell-group stay on track spiritually, biblically, and concerning purpose.⁴⁴

A point of disagreement that possibly exists between Comiskey and Vanderstelt is the purpose of a Sunday worship service. Consider Vanderstelt's statement,

I told all of my staff, all of my volunteers, "Anytime you wanna take the Sunday morning gathering time...since your kids are being taken care of in another part of the building, if you wanna use that for training...for counseling, whatever you wanna use that for, great, feel free to, but we're not running a bunch of programs in addition to that. ...I'm fine if you don't even hear me preach, that's okay because we're all about equipping disciples to make disciples..." So we let them use Sunday morning...so...the rest of the week is freed up for mission.⁴⁵

I infer from Comiskey's interview that Sunday gatherings have a celebratory focus of worship and testimony of what is happening within the cell-groups. I believe Vanderstelt would agree, but add that worship has a primary purpose of making-disciples and if there is a better way to do that, then skip the worship service. For Vanderstelt, he lives and breathes equipping disciples to make disciples. In my own interactions with elders of his former church in Tacoma, I have heard that he would sometimes cancel a Sunday worship service to get his congregation out into the community to be on mission, especially if his congregants had begun to become lazy or insular, thinking that Sunday worship is the only purpose of the church. While I agree that people need to be pushed out of their comfort zone, I also strongly believe a local church needs to gather weekly for worship *as a congregation* for two reasons: first, because the gathered church (in the New Testament) fellowshiped *together* through prayer, the word, equipping, singing, and communion (cf. Acts 2:42; Ephesians 4:11-12; 5:19-21; Hebrews 10:23-25; and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26); and second, because worship through song and prayer is what Christians will be doing *together* before the throne (cf. Revelation 4, 5, and 7). I believe this should be a conviction for every Christian.

44. Comiskey, interview by author, via Zoom, Seattle, July 6, 2016.

45. Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016.

For the most part the essence of these interviews has affirmed what I believe. Vanderstelt emphasized the church needs to take seriously its calling to make disciples who make disciples, and he believes this is done best through Sunday gatherings and Missional Communities in which Christians become a “family of servant missionaries.”⁴⁶ Timmis teaches the church is a people God “reveals His glory to, and reveals His glory through,” and that this happens when Christians do “life-on-life together on mission.” He believes the local church is most efficient when it gathers on Sundays and in homes, purposing to be an everyday community.⁴⁷ Comiskey believes this is achieved through “cell, celebration, equipping, and coaching.”⁴⁸ And Braga emphasizes that we are to go “be *with* the church” on Sunday “to hear the gospel, be fed the gospel,” and that we are to gather in homes “to live and be the gospel.”⁴⁹ This is the basic philosophy of ministry for each of these pastors, and the context in which they serve. Next I will focus on their recommendations for how to walk a church through the process of transition.

The Second Set of Questions: Open-Ended Related to Transitioning

For question seven I asked each pastor, “When transitioning a church from programs to cell, how should a leader make decisions about what ministry programs to keep? Which ones to cut? And how quickly to complete the transition?” This naturally led to question nine, which is about how to meet discipleship, accountability, and nurturing needs of women and men in a cell-group church. In between was the question of leader development of cell group leaders, which I will single out at the end of this section. These questions cut to the core of a successful transition from programs to cell.

46. Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016.

47. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

48. Comiskey, interview by author, via Zoom, Seattle, July 6, 2016.

49. Braga, interview by author, Burien, Washington, June 20, 2016.

Earlier I quoted Timmis saying, “So when we took over the church [building]...a few years ago...I was a lot more considerate in how I transitioned it.”⁵⁰ I asked him to expand on what he meant, and he answered,

...everything’s about culture, isn’t it? It’s not about just changing programs, it’s not about changing structures, it’s about changing culture. ...so programs and structures are an expression of culture, and leadership is about culture creation. I hadn’t understood that [until] I was in my 40s. ...I think there are five ways to do that. I identify this in terms of my own strategy. One is...preach it and teach it. So because I had a very clear theology of church...I just made sure we were preaching it and teaching it consistently. It was always kind of our meta-narrative if you’d like. So that statement I made earlier about “God’s purpose has always been about having a people for Himself, to display His glory to, and display His glory through,” that is an encapsulation of that...that sort of melodic line runs through all of our preaching and teaching....

Secondly, you pray it and sing it. And when I say pray it I don’t simply mean you pray for it...but that you structure your prayers as a community around it so you change people’s views, you’re praying for...Ethel who’s...cat is poor...you’re not just praying the cat gets better. You’re praying for Ethel to *suffer well*, as she’s losing this dear cat who’s been around for 15 years so that she might commend Jesus to her neighbors... And that is just an integral part of how you shape your prayer meeting. For me...you cannot overstate the importance of prayer meetings to cultural change. Anybody who tries to change culture without prayer is not changing culture. So you pray it, you sing it as well. ...we write many of our own [songs]...because that articulates our theology, in the same way that “Methodism” was born in song...they articulated their theology with Wesley’s 1,300 hymns. ...we try to do that, but also...we try to change the pronouns...from the singular...to plural. So we sing more about “we” than we do about “I” or “me.” ...and when you get God’s people rehearsing the truths of the Gospel in song...you’re building in that sort of shared corporate identity, it’s vital.

So you preach it, teach it; pray it, sing it; model, mentor it. ...you can’t change culture unless you model it, actually do it...as leaders. ...so you live life together on mission, you don’t distance yourself from it, you don’t give direction to people to do it, you really do model it. And you mentor as you’re doing it, you get guys alongside you, and you get them to share your life. ...one of the...features of doing church the way that we do it...is the necessity of an open home. ...our home is what God has given us to be a blessing to others because we are to be no more than stewards of it. ...I think it’s essential to, as a leader, have an open home in which you really can model and mentor what it means.

And so you preach it, teach it; pray it, sing it; model it, mentor it; and then you structure and resource it. So, you build appropriate structures, which for many people means...you downsize church with all of its programs...ministries... Cause of a lot of people don’t have time to engage with non-Christians, because they’re so busy doing church. So you gotta create space to do that so you strip back church. And then, you put your money where your mouth is...

...so those are four, there’s a fifth one that’s the most important of all, and that’s repeat. You just keep doing it. Preaching, teaching; praying, singing;

50. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

modeling, mentoring; ...structuring and resourcing. ...so articulating that, having that as a framework helped me to transition a church rather than just change a church.⁵¹

This is a basic mapping, an architectural design of motivating principles for transitioning a church. As he was explaining this I was thinking about my own church and I was beginning to be enlightened about why our church has changed structures but not always hearts. There is a culture within every church, a DNA so to speak, which causes church people to assume a certain methodology, especially if a person has been part of a particular church for a long time. I recently heard on National Public Radio, a quote by Albert Einstein who said, "You can't use the same thinking to solve a problem that was created by that thinking."⁵² The culture of a church will not change if the ones who created the DNA of a particular church do not change their thinking to become more biblical in how to make disciples who make disciples.

I asked Timmis how his strategy for changing culture at his current church has worked out. He said, "Very well" and explained, "I planted what I call our beta version of Crowded House in 1996 to 1998. And then I recruited a team to start Crowded House 1.0 in 2000. And we're at version 4.872," he said jokingly.⁵³ Concerning the question of which programs to cut and how quickly to make decisions, he said,

...one of the first things that I wrote...was *Eighteen Principles of Gospel Ministry*, and which became a book called *The Gospel Centred Church*. ...I did it with my colleague and friend Tim Chester; we try and address that very issue. And basically, I think that one of the problems that traditional churches have is that they don't know why they run some of the programs they do, they've just been running them. And a tradition, by definition, is that which you did yesterday, therefore you have to do it today. And you can be certain, therefore, that you'll be doing it tomorrow. ...so you've got to know why a particular ministry, a particular program is running. You've gotta have people who want to do it rather than recruiting or persuading people to do it...so, as soon as you get to the point where you're really having to work hard to staff, and I'm talking about volunteers

51. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

52. Chris Arnold, "A City Looks to STEM School To Lift Economy, But Will Grads Stay?" Morning Edition, aired September 22, 2016 on NPR, accessed September 22, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/2016/09/22/494727453/a-city-looks-to-stem-school-to-lift-economy-but-will-grads-stay>.

53. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

as much as I am paid staff, ...then you've got to ask very hard questions about the validity of keeping that...program running. ...many churches, particularly larger churches that've got a long history...they've accrued programs like barnacles to a ship's hull. ...so just ask hard questions... How is it helping you reach people for Christ? How is it helping you disciple people...to live a life as followers of Jesus...in tangible ways [?] ...get people from the outside...say, "Look, you come in and ask whatever question you want, challenge whatever," ...and your willingness to do that, to open yourself up to scrutiny, it will basically be the best indicator of your willingness...to run the hard yards...of this kind of transition. Cause it is hard for most people. And part of the problem...is that a lot of people are more concerned about church growth than they are about being faithful followers of Jesus. And so a lot of people have transitioned to a cell church model...because they think...this is the way to grow. And I would refute that, it isn't the way to get more numbers, it's not the way to get a bigger church. If we weren't so concerned about discipleship, I'm absolutely certain we would be at least twice the size that we are now.⁵⁴

Timmis' last few sentences convey the key decision making factors in choosing to transition to the cell-group model of ministry. Does a local church leadership want to attract a crowd and neglect disciple-making or equip people to make disciples who make disciples? It is relatively easy for Christians to go, sit, and listen on Sunday, and then go about one's business the rest of the week. It is relatively difficult to work on one's relationships with people in Christian community, making commitments to each other to serve one another and be on mission, together. But just like exercise, there are benefits to devoting oneself to a disciple-making church no matter the method of ministry. In chapter one I was a bit harsh in my assessment of the program-driven model, but I am finding through these interviews that the issue is not program versus cell, rather as Timmis opines, each pastor or ministry leader needs to make an assessment of why a particular program exists, and measure its effectiveness at communal disciple-making.

Earlier I mentioned Vanderstelt likens programs to organs in a body. He would say that if an organ is vital to the survival of a church, do not cut that organ out or you will kill the patient (the church). But if the organ is like a cancer draining resources from making disciples, then it is time for that organ to be removed so that the lifeblood can

54. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

flow through the rest of the body. But he would also say don't remove too many organs too quickly, for this could kill the patient as well.⁵⁵ Getting more specific he said,

So many churches keep adding programs and they added them probably in a state of their existence when it made sense. And then they passed beyond that state, but they kept the program. ...so I'm asking the question: 1) does it fit the filter to make disciples well? 2) are we simplified enough so people know, these are the absolutes you must be a part of to help you become a disciple that makes disciples? And 3) do we have the resource ability to even do those well?

So for instance when I came on [staff at Doxa] I said, "We got...three basic programs around here... 'gather, go, and grow,'" So...we "gather" on Sunday...and maybe one-off gatherings for special events...but it's...gotta exhort and encourage the body towards the mission of making disciples... Then "go" is the Missional Community...with a group of people who love one another like family, you serve like Jesus served...and share the gospel as missionaries both to each other and to unbelievers. And the third one was "grow," get into accountability with a few guys, we call them DNA groups, or [with] a few ladies.⁵⁶

Vanderstelt gave an example of a few women at Doxa who asked if they could run a women's ministry similar to what they were part of during the Mars Hill era of the church. Vanderstelt ran them through the filter and guided them to figure out how to do women's ministry in Doxa's structure of "gather, go, grow." He has given permission to creatively figure out how to meet people's discipleship needs within that structure.⁵⁷

I believe this is a good filter because it gives flexibility within boundaries so that the people are not starting too many different ministries that compete with one another for people, time, and resources to run a particular ministry. Timmis would call this a "glorious flexibility." He advises pastors come up with a base-line structure for guidance for how a particular small group is formed, but then give people the freedom to form groups around a particular mission or a particular neighborhood.⁵⁸ When I first brought Home Communities (HCs) to Grace, I was inspired by Vanderstelt's initial teaching to focus on one's neighbors in a neighborhood. And so I worked with my elders to make this a requirement for HCs at Grace. Yet, to bring this about has been an uphill battle.

55. Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016.

56. Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016.

57. Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016.

58. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

But Vanderstelt has *changed his mind on this*, and like Timmis he gives people options to build a group based on location or a gospel “initiative” (mission) in their context of everyday rhythms of life.⁵⁹ This is a pragmatic approach, which gets rid of unnecessary tension for leadership trying to make HCs look uniform.

I asked Vanderstelt a follow-up question about how they do both Missional Communities and DNA groups. I discerned Doxa’s methodology is similar to the Methodist movement of “Societies, Bands, and Classes.” At Doxa, DNA groups are like “Bands” focusing on men or women only, for weekly in-depth accountability and discipleship. Missional Communities are like “Classes.” They are mixed gender, multi-generational and have more of a community and family feel. Doxa does not have Sunday school classes for adults, per se, but they do conduct trainings on Sundays once per month (usually after the second church service or in the evening, depending if there is a Seahawk game) for all Missional Community leaders. Vanderstelt also allows his staff to do discipleship training for groups during one of the two worship services on Sunday mornings, so that people can be equipped and still attend worship.⁶⁰

This is a plausible working model, but for Grace Church our leaders and members have found it difficult to be part of a weekly HC, discipleship group, and to help out with AWANA or another ministry such as MOPs or Sunday school during the week. And so to me it sounds like the expectation at Doxa, to be part of both a DNA group and Missional Community, is a bit much. I would think people would be inclined to make a choice between the two, instead of both, and so I asked Vanderstelt if he felt this was too much to expect of his people. He said, “We don’t have any other programs, so our whole week is completely free. We have nothing going on that the church runs all week.

59. Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016.

60. Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016.

So the only thing we have going on is what they would be doing.”⁶¹ He explained that a person would be expected to be part of a Missional Community during the week, but that some groups eat together and split up for DNA time after the meal. Other groups have DNA meetings in their everyday context, at lunch with other Christians from their church at Microsoft, or early morning coffee before work, or even during one of the two worship services. About this level of discipleship and care, Vanderstelt said, “I’ve found that once people realize how important it is to have someone in their life developing them, they make the time. Because they make the time for what matters most.”⁶²

Vanderstelt’s methodology removes competition between programs, which is the problem Grace Church has experienced; competition for people, time, money, and resources. And, in my observation, there is competition between church activities and everyday life, which is the main reason I believe some do not pursue discipleship relationships in small group community.

Concerning simplification within the church, what to cut, keep, or add and how quickly to make decisions, Dan Braga said,

Wow, that is a hard question to answer. Obviously, if you have a program, I think you first have to have a very distinct set of metrics that you use to look at programs. So what are your standards of success? You have to define what they are. ...I’ll just talk about Taproot. We believe that the primary means of discipleship are the scriptures in community. We believe discipleship happens at that organic, relational level. And that’s why Home Gatherings are emphasized as absolutely, non-negotiable, necessary for health. When we have men’s ministry...we say, “This is a vitamin that supplements the meal of HG and Sunday gatherings.”

Our youth ministry – I fought having a youth ministry forever – ...our youth pastor is very committed to our model of ministry... And they are constantly taught that, “We’re not a separate church, like this isn’t the youth group, we’re Taproot Church and this is part of our discipleship and *being* with the church, and *being* the church to *students*...”⁶³

61. Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016.

62. Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016.

63. Braga, interview by author, Burien, Washington, June 20, 2016.

In the interview, Braga had stated that one cannot be a covenant member of Taproot without serving in a Home Gathering and serving on Sundays. I like Braga's reasoning, but I would stop short of saying one's membership is contingent upon being an active part of a Home Community at Grace. There are about one hundred members of Grace that were members before I became senior pastor. Some of these members have joined Home Communities, some have not. If I communicated, "Join an HC or you will no longer be a member," I might change the structure, but not the culture. I believe I would face a battle, and experience tells me this is a battle to avoid. And so I would rather try to win people to biblical reasoning as to why joining a Home Community would be beneficial. I like how Braga communicated that Sunday worship and HGs are the main meal, and everything else is a supplement meant to feed and make disciples. That encapsulates what I believe pastors and churches need to communicate. As already noted, Timmis stated that to change culture, pastors need to "structure it and resource it."⁶⁴ Sundays and HCs at Grace provide this structure, and everything else ought to support and resource this ministry. Vanderstelt said more or less the same thing when he described Sundays as being a primary way to equip the saints and cast vision. Other trainings at Doxa are meant to resource or supplement the disciple-making process while retaining the focus of Sundays, Missional Communities, and DNA groups.⁶⁵ Back to the interview with Braga concerning how quickly to transition he said,

...you got guys all across the map, I'm a "pull the band-aide off fast" kinda guy just by wiring and personality, I can't sit in something for too long if I'm not comfortable with it... I have a friend...he's a Presbyterian guy, and he said flat out, "I'm not making a decision for at least ten years." Actually, I...was able to ask John Piper... He said, "I waited ten years before I made one big decision." ...I also have friends who came in and within 18 months had done like I had done. Everything was changed, vision, mission, names, music, everything. It was "roll it up, throw it in the garbage and start over."⁶⁶

64. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

65. Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016.

66. Braga, interview by author, Burien, Washington, June 20, 2016.

I would agree that timing is somewhat dependent on personality, but it is also dependent on conviction, wisdom, and a calling from the Lord. A mentor of mine named Luke Hendrix (who was Executive Pastor of Imago Dei in Portland, Oregon at the time), explained to me once that there are the “churched” and the “unchurched” and that pastors often focus time and energy to reach the “unchurched,” to convert them and help them become part of the local church. But Hendrix believes it is as big of a win for the Kingdom if pastors help the “churched” to begin to live out the gospel missionally as a community.⁶⁷ This piece of wisdom has been my conviction since.

Concerning what ministry programs to cut, keep, change, or add and how quickly a pastor should try to fully transition a church, Comiskey said,

Well they say it takes about five years, in...North America to make a full transition. So, you know I would say don't cut any programs until the cells have replaced the need for those programs. Like, for example when you have enough cells...you're not going to suddenly need a visitation program if your cells are visiting. You're not going to suddenly need an evangelism program because your cells are evangelizing. ...but I would say don't cut any programs until the cells could truly fulfill the reason for those programs. ...for example...children's ministry...give it a timeline, like...in two years we would like to see enough Intergenerational [multigenerational] Cells that we would not need to make AWANA the main thing in our church...⁶⁸

This is our primary crossroads decision our leadership needs to make in the next few years to fully transition to the missional and cell-group model, and this is the topic of discussion in the final three questions of these interviews. But I want to take a moment and walk through leader development by each of these pastors, as I believe this is essential to the development of a cell-group church and the success of a full transition.

I begin with Comiskey's answer as his is the most succinct, and because I happen to be using many of his materials at Grace, specifically a series of discipleship books called *Live, Encounter, Grow, Share, and Lead*. Concerning the question of how he does equipping, Comiskey explained that it takes about six months to a year to get

67. Luke Hendrix, private conversation, Portland, Oregon, 2009.

68. Comiskey, interview by author, via Zoom, Seattle, July 6, 2016.

people through the material. This can be taught in a class, a seminar, one-on-one, or through an audio pod-cast. However a person might learn the information, what is important is that everyone gets *through* the same equipping with follow-up by a mentor or coach. Comiskey calls this “discipleship equipping” instead of simply classroom information transfer. And this equipping is to be in conjunction with being part of a cell group to practice what is being learned with the goal of potentially leading a group.⁶⁹

Concerning the five books Comiskey uses for equipping and discipleship, he recommends for pastors, “...you can start with somebody else’s equipping, but then your goal is to make your own equipping. So that it becomes part of who you are as a church, and obviously you save a lot of money...but basically take somebody else’s ...but then determine your own.”⁷⁰ I mentioned to Comiskey that a couple of our groups have used *Live* and *Share* to lead their Home Community. I asked him if he thought this was wise and he recommended that these books *not* be used as a resource for a cell lesson. And so I asked if a cell lesson should always be based on the sermons or if discipleship resources should ever be used in this context, and he said,

Well number one I think you want to grant liberty to your people...that’s the place of your supervision...your supervisor can discuss with the leaders and find out what they’re doing...but I would say for the most part, if it’s possible following the pastor’s sermon is much better because...it’s like you know as well as I do...that people hear what’s going on on Sunday, but they’re not really applying it...if you can know that they’re gonna be wrestling with some of those concepts in their own lives during their home groups, that really makes a difference in their lives.... Now, my feeling...is that you can always give them some variety...there’s nothing wrong with that...but get back into your sermon... Now the key is to have that lesson in their hands before you preach, so the leaders can be looking at what you’re saying, “Okay I wanna do this, I don’t want to do that; I like this question, I don’t like that question.” So...they’re saying...“Okay, what am I gonna do with that in my life group the next week?”⁷¹

This is essentially what I did with our leadership for the first four years of Home Communities at Grace, but many of the questions I was writing were irrelevant. So I

69. Comiskey, interview by author, via Zoom, Seattle, July 6, 2016.

70. Comiskey, interview by author, via Zoom, Seattle, July 6, 2016.

71. Comiskey, interview by author, via Zoom, Seattle, July 6, 2016.

asked Comiskey his perspective on this and how to write better questions. Comiskey recommended a book he wrote called *How To Lead A Great Cell Group*.⁷² In it is a chapter on how to write good questions, which I have since read and am putting into practice for our new series in Ephesians. In the interview, Comiskey recommended six to eight questions going from “observation to application” with a heavy emphasis on application and open ended questions that get people talking.⁷³

Regarding leader development, Vanderstelt recommends apprenticeship using a curriculum called *The Saturate Field Guide*. It is based on his book *Saturate*, and is specifically designed to help a new leaders get a new group off the ground, which takes eight to twelve weeks. Doxa starts “pilot groups” using this curriculum, while also requiring a leader go through a two-year training track using videos and taking advantage of the apprenticeship relationship for ongoing coaching and discipleship even beyond the two-year training (they keep making new videos to supplement training, which is available online at www.saturatetheworld.com). The materials and curriculum he calls “supplemental formal training,” similar to what Braga would call it. One aspect of training Doxa emphasizes is character-competency assessment. Vanderstelt said,

...unfortunately most education in America...isn't so much competency based, it's get 'em through the curriculum.... We don't do that. We're not just after getting people through the curriculum, it's like, “What competencies do you already have? Which ones are you lacking? And how do we develop that?” And then it's very high-character based. For me...much of leadership development has less to do with competency and more to do with character. Because that's where most people get messed up, it's their character. ...the only way I know how to do that is hands-on observable training, we gotta be in their life, be in their home, be in their family... If you're not with them, then you'll never know the character. Because you can fake character...through performance....⁷⁴

Timmis would chime in and agree that leaders need to model life-on-life on mission through an open home. To train leaders, Timmis and Chester developed a

72. Joel Comiskey, *How To Lead a Great Cell Group* (Moreno Valley, CA: CCS Publishing, 2001).

73. Comiskey, interview by author, via Zoom, Seattle, July 6, 2016.

74. Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016.

leader-training curriculum called *Porterbrook*. They regularly walk younger people through this apprenticeship and equipping material with the potential to become elders. Timmis' goal is that the average age of an elder would be about his son's age, late twenties or early thirties, so that the next generation would be inspired to be part of a community on mission. And Chester and Timmis have a goal to regularly train up leaders and send out church plants, as opposed to building one large mega-church.⁷⁵ Their goal is to reproduce disciple-makers and send them out to be "communities of light" in various contexts. Timmis describes sending out one of his leaders,

...the size of our church is round about...320, and our eldership is currently nine with another three candidates...probably coming on in September [2016]. But we give...leaders away a lot. Like Tim Chester, we sent him away to a church plant about 70 miles away. ...we did that in September [2015], which was a big...thing for us because I recruited him at the start of Crowded House 1.0, so he's worked with me for 15 years. And he's a very able and godly man, so it was a big hit for us, we thought, but we've gone on without missing a beat. So we miss him relationally but we haven't missed him...which is just a real mark of God's grace. We're just about to [send out] another elder, so we try and give people away.⁷⁶

I believe this signifies a healthy church. They are focused on making disciples and giving people away to plant churches. Braga has a similar philosophy,

We use apprentice language. So...somebody who's been leading, they have one or two other [potential] leaders...and [we are] just...very intentional [and say], "I'd like you to come alongside and consider multiplying this group." And it's usually between anywhere from six months to eighteen months of co-leading with an established leader. We have a pastor that oversees all of our home gatherings, Darin Brill, he does monthly coaching calls with all of our HG leaders, so there's direct pastoral oversight. Darin's vision for HGs is really beautiful, and I've really yielded to his lead on that, completely....

...we have our Gospel Residency stuff, our gospel leadership training material, which is a two year process, which takes you from theology of kingdom and culture all the way through mission, character development....⁷⁷

The "Gospel Residency" started as an Acts 29 Network pilot program with a few other pastors to train local leaders and church planters without having to send potential leaders to seminary in another city. The goal of Gospel Residencies is to gather people

75. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

76. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

77. Braga, interview by author, Burien, Washington, June 20, 2016.

together within his church for track one, to teach theology and philosophy of ministry to laypeople in order to form, in them, leadership skills to minister more effectively in and through their Home Gatherings. Track two has less than a dozen people with a narrowed focus of equipping potential elders, pastors, or church planters. The material used for track one and two are seminary-level books and the method of teaching is a Socratic discussion based on questions given out along with the reading assignments to be thought through in preparation for participation in the seminar discussion.

The fruit of Braga's efforts is he has reproduced leaders to the extent he has a brand new crop of thirty students signed up from within and outside his church, for Gospel Residency track one, which was to begin fall 2016. This ministry is having an impact on other churches besides just Taproot. In his own words,

...we just recently introduced the idea...(because I'm a church re-planter)...of our students and couples if they would consider going into one of the little dead churches here in Burien...as a catalytic couple to help that pastor break through some of the strongholds that they're facing. We want to send our people into local Burien churches to strengthen the Church... Just to be a help, just to come and serve as a missionary... This is Paul's idea...in the Book of Acts...he wanted to strengthen the churches. And I've become persuaded that revival and mission will continue and happen if we strengthen already dead churches, and plant new churches. It's not either/or, it's both/and.⁷⁸

Braga recognizes he doesn't have it all figured out and that he would need to work with local church leaders in order to make this work. But he is excited about the potential. Each of the pastors interviewed has described ministry that is effective for adults in reaching Generation X and Millennials. I do have many questions, though, concerning how to do youth and children's ministry in a missional or cell-driven church. As noted before, this is a key crossroads Grace Church faces in fully recontextualizing from programs to missional and cell-driven methodology.

78. Braga, interview by author, Burien, Washington, June 20, 2016.

The Final Set of Questions: Related to Children / Youth in Cell Ministry

As a reminder of the context of Grace Church, we have Sunday worship and Children's Church on Sundays, Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPs) every other Monday, Grief Share on Saturdays, Home Communities throughout the week, and AWANA, Youth Group, and adult discipleship classes on Wednesdays and equipping for each of these ministries. The tension primarily revolves around the question if Grace should keep AWANA (or a modified Wednesday program) versus ending all programs during the week to fully invest in "Intergenerational Cells" or "IG" Groups as Comiskey calls them in *Children in Cell Ministry*.⁷⁹ And so questions nine through eleven in the interviews were designed to figure out how a Home Community can minister to women, men, and children in a multigenerational context. And question twelve had the purpose of discerning if there is a benefit to developing a hybrid between cell and programs.

For Timmis, The Crowded House has multigenerational Life Groups. He does not divide men and women into DNA groups like Vanderstelt at Doxa. Rather, he recommends an occasional men's or women's event or forum that is for a specific purpose. But this only takes place once every six months or so. Concerning discipleship of men and women separately he said, "...we tend not to draw the lines of discipleship in those terms. So, we want there to be a real sense of the Life Group being an extended family, where we disciple one another."⁸⁰ When I asked Timmis how he does children's ministry in Life Groups he said,

...I'm not one of the guys that do missional communities who's down upon attractional church. ...all church should be attractional... in that we should all live invitationally, any kind of activity you want to be invitationally to, you want people to be drawn to it, you want to be open...so we talk about two front doors.

So we have a front door that exists in our Life Group.... And we have a front door to our gathering. And actually most of the growth comes from the gathering...because the front door to the world of the small group is...the fruit's

79. Joel Comiskey, *Children in Cell Ministry: Discipling the Future Generation Now* (Moreno Valley, CA: CCS Publishing, 2016), 67-89.

80. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

quite high. The front door in the gathering, still even in such a post-Christian context as England, the fruit is relatively low compared to that. So, it's easier to pick. ...on staff we have a family worker...who...is really about equipping families to do life-on-life together on mission. But, on a Sunday morning in our gatherings we will run a children's program. Quite deliberately we will do that. And we want to equip those kids to be missionaries, so we want them to understand the bible story, we want them to contribute to their Life Groups. So we don't take them out of their Life Groups, we want them to play a key part in that Life Groups that have kids...will be shaped by the kids as much as they are by the adults. So you can't run a Life Group that's mainly full of students, or marrieds with no kids...in the same way you run one where there's lots of kids. You just can't. But we want every Life Group to see children as an integral *part*. Not a distraction or an encumbrance. And the same with youth as well. We will get the youth together, in a way of helping them be missionaries. But we won't form youth Life Groups ...they will be part of other Life Groups that are multigenerational.⁸¹

This sounds much like Vanderstelt's and Braga's churches, concerning children being involved in the Missional Community groups. One difference between The Crowded House and either Doxa or Taproot is Braga and Vanderstelt each recommend discipleship care for men and women in small group contexts. I have already shown how Doxa does men's and women's ministry through DNA groups, but I have not explored how Braga focuses on discipleship of men and women during the week. To this question about how they include men, women, and children in HGs, Braga admitted it is a mess, but they have developed a rhythm. During, say, the first Tuesday of the month a group will meet all together and have a family night, with upwards of fifteen adults and fifteen children. The next Tuesday the men will watch the children while the women meet. The following week the women will watch the children while the men meet. And then the final Tuesday of the month they will have a "free-for-all" fun night in which they order pizza and play games. On Sundays they have children's church, which is where the children receive a majority of their theological training.⁸²

Before asking these questions of Comiskey, I thought of an email I had sent him about the subject. His response was to do cell ministry with adults and send children to

81. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

82. Braga, interview by author, Burien, Washington, June 20, 2016.

the AWANA program up the street. I thought to myself, “We are the church with the AWANA program up the street.” This was in the back of my mind when I asked Comiskey these questions. In the interview he gave a little different answer, at first he recommended we have men’s cells, women’s cells, children cells, and youth cell groups. To me this sounds like multiple nights of different programs leading to the separation of families and too much going on throughout the week unless they all met at the church building. So I explained that Grace Church’s leadership desires to develop Intergenerational (IG) groups. To which he responded,

...I love multi-intergenerational...because you can more easily get the children involved. So...I would say double down on the home groups. ...one way to do that [divide men, women, and children] in the intergenerational groups is...during the prayer time have the men divide in another room with the men, and the women with the women.... You know the men could pray together... And then you can have the men’s retreat occasionally. But again I think you’re right on, do not overburden them with time restraints. ...to be in the cell is the priority...⁸³

Comiskey went on to challenge my thinking concerning Home Communities all looking the same. He recommended, like Timmis and Vanderstelt, that we have flexibility. He believes a group should start with the definition of a cell, and then have flexibility within that definition. Concerning the question of how we should communicate a transition from AWANA to IG cell-groups, Comiskey said,

You wanna talk with your key people and say, “Hey, would you be willing to make the transition with us? We would like to see your children that are now in AWANA in a home cell group, would you be willing to do that and help us in the process? We are really gonna put a lot of money into Sunday service, and then also in children’s cells [in Home Communities]. ...we’re not gonna do anything abruptly. Right now AWANA will continue, but in a year we would like to see this transition take place.” So everything is in transitional terms... [say] “Intergenerational cells, we’re gonna care for your children, they’re gonna get the same thing they’d get in AWANA, but they’ll get it in home groups, in fact it’s gonna save time for you. And it’s gonna benefit our church long term. Cause your children are gonna understand cell ministry.” ...pray with your elders, you’re gonna need your elders behind this, you’re gonna need to drink lots of coffee with people. You know, one-on-one...just make sure people are sold on it...cause people can...nod their heads, and then later resist...⁸⁴

83. Comiskey, interview by author, via Zoom, Seattle, July 6, 2016.

84. Comiskey, interview by author, via Zoom, Seattle, July 6, 2016.

This is helpful for mapping out how I can communicate with the pastors, elders, and leaders of Grace Church in order to work together and implement a plan for a full transition from programs to cell. But I am still not convinced that Grace Church should get rid of AWANA, especially considering it is bringing lifeblood into the church as Vanderstelt would describe. So I asked him his thoughts on the matter, specifically if he thought if there was an advantage to keeping AWANA, to which he said,

If it's making disciples who make disciples...yeah. I was in a church in Kent when I first moved back to the Seattle area before I planted, and they fought for AWANA going all the way up to high school. And I said, "Well, I'm not gonna be against that as long as your kids are learning to make disciples of non-believing kids, leading them to Christ, and then training them up, walking with Christ." I had one kid who was fighting me on it...he was like, "Well I'm a disciple, and I'm mature." And I said, "Okay, well tell me about your non-believing friends." And he said, "I don't have any." And I said, "Tell me about one person you've led to Christ." He said, "I never had." Then I said, "Well then you're not a disciple who makes disciples. So don't tell me AWANA's trained you well, because until you can point to people that you've led to Christ and developed to be disciple makers, then you're still a very young Christian in a lot of ways. Just cause you memorized a lot of Scripture doesn't make you mature." ...so I fought against that not because I was anti-AWANA, because I think you can do AWANA in very effective disciple-making ways, but they weren't willing to go there. They didn't want it to be a disciple-making ministry. They want it to be a way their son can get scholarships...for Christian colleges. So they were motivated from a very different motivational structure. So I wasn't gonna keep a program going just for one family that was gonna fight me on it. But if it would have been for the whole church being disciple-makers, I would have kept it. But it wasn't...so we just reduced it to children, because it...seemed to work really well at reaching the neighborhood kids. They seemed to still be connecting to it because it [had] a Boy Scouts kinda feel to it, because at that point it seemed to make sense culturally. I don't know if it still does, that's maybe a question I'd want to wrestle with. But...[it] seems like kids are so busy these days, with so many activities, it feels like adding one more thing, might be taking them out of the mission field they could be in. Like their sporting events or other things their parents seem to be very committed to. I would rather take the things that are already going on in their world and then train them how to do those things with more gospel intentionality than they're probably used to. But, if they've got the time and the space and the margin to add another event, and still be engaged missionally where they're at, then I'd say I wouldn't have a problem with it...⁸⁵

The AWANA program may not be the most culturally relevant way to make disciples of children in the Puget Sound region of today, but I have seen that it *can* be

85. Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016.

effective for elementary school age children to memorize Scripture and to challenge children to reach out to their friends to introduce children to Christ and the church. This is how I came to know Christ when I was eight years old. But, if outreach is not one of the emphases for the children coming from the adults, then AWANA tends to focus only on Scripture memory without helping children reach people for Christ.

The Question: Fully Transition or Develop a Workable Hybrid?

The more I interacted with each of these pastors, the more I began to realize that one methodology is not inherently better than another. Timmis put it like this,

...you gotta have the right metrics to measure them [programs] by, in terms of... how is it helping you...as a church. ...don't just run a program because... "that's what churches do." ...if you take the young people, what's the best way that we can equip these [youth]? Well certainly one, I would say, would be for them to be integrated in a Life Group where if they're teenagers they're hanging out with guys in their 20s. I mean that's just relationally a very important influence on them...for young kids to have lots of auntie's and uncle's and grandma's and grandpa's...that's just gonna be really healthy for them. ...in terms of God's purposes, the physical family was created to be a world's example of what church should be.... It's the primary community. So...that's why having it multigenerational is so important.

But you then [make] a judgment call...we've got loads of kids, I mean a ridiculous number of children in our church. You know I wanted to preach a sermon a while ago saying, "We are neither Catholics nor rabbits, basically, just stop breeding." And...we've got them coming through from being like nine, ten, eleven into their teenage years and just socially that's a difficult time, isn't it? I mean...biologically it's difficult, but socially it is, and even more so now with all the pressures in terms of sexuality and gender. And so you've got to ask the hard question, how can we do that [youth work]? ...to help them be missionaries to their friends... But you do it in a way that's connected with the Life Group that they're part of. So that...it's an expression of their Life Group. But, you're taking kids from a number of Life Groups, small groups, Home Communities, whatever you call them, but that's a judgment call you make in the moment.⁸⁶

Timmis affirmed that each church needs to have a multigenerational component because the church is meant to be like extended family. In conclusion of my interview with him, I explained the crossroads Grace Church faces concerning decisions about

86. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

AWANA and programs in general, and concerning if every group should be intergenerational versus allowing for flexibility, and he said,

I would say you don't make it a crossroads. Don't make an either-or; you make a judgement call in terms of missional opportunity. ...so you might very well make a lot of sense to say, okay, you got... "moms and tots" here, you got...kids, youth...they're all ministry teams. And they're part of a ministry stream to families. ...and that has kind of a bit of a geographical location to some extent, but not exclusively. But, we're saying, "Okay...we've got people here, the 'moms and tots' stage and we can look to see the 18 years of experience of exposure to the gospel. So that's why we're doing it this way." ...because everybody lives in a particular location, then you've got the opportunity to bless that... And it may be that you've got so...many people in a particular part of the city, a project housing where we've moved people to over the years for the sake of the gospel. And...that's where there is a particular ministry but its [based on] location. But within that location they'll start doing their particular ministry focus...work. So...there's just a glorious flexibility to it.

My...critiques of any particular model of church is [people] somehow try to baptize that and say, "this is God's model,"...and, it *isn't*. I mean none of our models are God's model. ...I just want to see...a pastor of a mega church...grappling with the question with his leadership team, "How're we gonna make the most of Jesus in this community? How [are] we going to exploit the place we have in our neighborhood? And is God going to be honored with that? Of course He is. Is He gonna judge him – that leadership team because they...haven't been quite as radical as we've been in ministry? I don't think so at all."⁸⁷

This is the realization I believe Braga and Vanderstelt have come to as well.

They would not say programs have no value. In fact, I believe they would each say that a program can have tremendous value, especially for children and youth, if those programs have an emphasis of making disciples.

These interviews were insightful. I do not believe these pastors have solved for me, my staff, and the elders of Grace Church Seattle, the question if we should fully transition away from AWANA, MOPs, Grief Share, and programs in general to a pure "cell-group" model in terms of embracing "Intergenerational Cell" groups. I see the advantage and problems of both the cell-driven and program-driven models of ministry, especially as it pertains to children's ministry. And so between writing chapters four and five, I will present this problem to the elders and staff of Grace Church Seattle, and then

87. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

listen to each interview with this leadership team in order to determine if we should fully transition and end all programs outside of Sunday mornings, or if we should maintain a mid-week children's ministry that is in the cell-model and which meets at the church building. Based on what I have learned thus far, I plan to map out for the elders what I believe is best for Grace Church over the next few years, and then present this information to our leadership team following our elder and pastor conversations concerning what we learned from the interviews.

In chapter five, I will walk through what the elders and pastors learned in order to improve our disciple-making system; I will map out my suggestions for how to do children's and youth ministry in a missional and cell-driven model of church; and I will write out a strategy for transition for a new pastor considering leading their church through this kind of recontextualization of a church.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction: Transitioning Culture, Not Just Structure

After researching how to transition an established attractional-events and program-driven church to a missional and cell-driven model, I have concluded three things. First, there is not a “one size fits all” method of ministry. There are various methods and models of ministry that a pastor can utilize to make disciples who make disciples. Second, in order for changes to last, a pastor needs a recontextualization strategy and metrics for decision-making to transition not just the structure, but the culture of a church so that a new DNA of ministry methodology will transform that community. And third, the most difficult aspect of this transition is solving the problem of how to make disciple-makers of children and youth within the cell-driven structure.

In this chapter I will explain that the methodology to be chosen for a particular church is somewhat dependent on the culture in which one lives. I will explain where Grace is at in terms of recontextualizing from events and programs to the missional and cell model. I have shared my research with the leadership of Grace Church Seattle; in this thesis I will share my recommendations for how to move forward based on our elder-pastor discussions subsequent to listening to the interviews referenced in chapter four. Specifically, I will address the need for agreement concerning the cell-driven structure, for equipping, for a metrics of measurement of success, and I will describe the options for children’s and youth ministry in a missional cell-driven model of church. Finally, I will share what guiding wisdom I would have like to have heard from a mentor before attempting this kind of transition as a new senior pastor. Sound advice I received from a leader before I accepted this position was, “It’s easy to put it on paper, it’s a lot harder to carry it out in reality.”

Methodology of Ministry Somewhat Depends on Cultural Context

A conclusion I have come to is both the missional cell-driven model and the attractional-events / program-driven model can be utilized to develop a reproducible disciple-making system. The determining factor, for me, in deciding which model to employ is two-fold. The first has to do with how much time a family has to be a part of various ministries. I believe the cell-driven model more easily enables families to do ministry together, especially if the church emphasizes intergenerational (IG) cells. In a program-driven church, it is likely that family members will engage programs separately; with the amount of extra-curricular activities families are often involved in, I believe this works against disciple-making because they are spread too thin. A second determining factor of what model to follow, in my opinion, has to do with the DNA of a particular church and the cultural context in which that church exists. It may be easier to draw a crowd through events and programs in a more Christian society, but this is not necessarily the case in secular Seattle. As Vanderstelt explained, often when church planters associated with Acts 29 Network realize the attractional and program model doesn't work in the Puget Sound area to draw a crowd, they seek counsel from Vanderstelt in how to reach people through the missional community methodology.¹

While Christianity was a predominant worldview of early America, it was not until Christian leaders took the gospel outside of church buildings during the Great Awakenings of the mid-18th century and early 19th century that people were impacted by the gospel, with the result to fill churches with new converts. The Church Growth movement of the 20th century resulted in a boom of mega-churches being built with Sunday services and programs being utilized to help people grow in the Lord.² But in today's culture, the West has become a melting pot of ideas leading to religious

1. Jeff Vanderstelt, interviewed by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016

2. Garth M Rosell, *Boston's Historic Park Street Church: The Story of an Evangelical Landmark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2009), 81-111.

pluralism, secularism, and a significant number of unchurched people in this country.³ Barna research shows approximately one hundred million Americans were unchurched in 2007, and about fifteen million believed in Jesus but had become dechurched.⁴ Tim Chester and Steve Timmis believe, “What is clear is that great swathes of America will not be reached through Sunday morning services.”⁵ Their reasoning is Westerners live in not only a post-Christian culture, but in secular “post-Christendom” (Christendom was the alliance of church and state in Europe in which Christianity became the civil religion).⁶ Thus Christians in the West must learn to navigate societal change having gone from the center to the margins, from a majority to minority, from settlers in the Christian homeland to pilgrims in a foreign culture, from privilege to pluralism, from control of societal norms to witness of the gospel of Jesus, from maintenance of the church institutional to mission as a movement.⁷ And so for Christians to reach the unchurched and dechurched in a secular society, churches must shift “...focus from putting on attractional events to creating attractional communities. Our marginal status is an opportunity to rediscover our missional calling from God.”⁸

I believe the missional and cell-model organically creates communities that are attractive as they are gospel-driven. This creates the relational apologetic of community that matches the doctrine of ecclesiology Christians claim to believe.⁹ I am convinced this is the nearest model of ministry to what one reads concerning local church in the New Testament. While this methodology is not explicitly commanded in Scripture, one can infer from reading the Gospels and Acts that Christians passed on what they had

3. Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Everyday Church: Gospel Communities on Mission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 13-15.

4. The Barna Group, “Un-church Population Nears 100 Million in the U.S.,” barna.org (19 March 2007); accessed December 19, 2016, <https://www.barna.com/research/unchurched-population-nears-100-million-in-the-u-s/>.

5. Chester and Timmis, *Everyday Church*, 15.

6. Chester and Timmis, *Everyday Church*, 19.

7. Chester and Timmis, *Everyday Church*, 20.

8. Chester and Timmis, *Everyday Church*, 10.

9. Tim Chester and Steve Timmis. *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping around Gospel and Community* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 175-176.

learned from disciple-makers by doing life-on-life together on mission.¹⁰ This is what a relationally and spiritually starved generation is longing to see and experience in church.

Therefore, my first conclusion is a senior pastor and leader team need to discern the culture in which they live in, and pragmatically figure out how best to structure their church to make disciple-makers in their given context. The senior leadership of any church needs to wrestle with how to get their membership to do life-on-life together on mission for Jesus.¹¹ If programs and events create these opportunities, if people are being trained, converts are being won, disciples are being made, and the people are not feeling burned out, then that church is not necessarily in need of recontextualization. But if this is not happening, then the leadership needs to evaluate why, and work through a process to change the culture of that church to become relevant disciple-makers.

Working Together with Leadership to Make Decisions

A reason I conducted interviews in my research was so that the elders and pastors of Grace Church Seattle could: i) listen to the interviews together, ii) evaluate our transition based on what other more seasoned ministers of the Gospels had done, and iii) to make decisions on how to complete the process at Grace. There were several points made in each interview that are particularly applicable for our church – or for any church – wishing to successfully recontextualize. I will walk through those points in the order in which we listened to the interviews and explain the tensions that surfaced during these discussions, what our elders and pastors did for resolution, and then share my recommendations for how Grace Church ought to continue in recontextualization.

In a sense, each interviewee played the role of an outside consultant who was answering questions the elders and pastors of Grace had been wrestling through for

10. Steve Timmis, interview by author, Seattle, March 14, 2016, recorded on iPhone, transcript in Appendix B.

11. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

close to seven years. A major takeaway expressed by each interviewee is that ministry leaders must unite behind the senior pastor's vision and take it upon themselves to become advocates of missional and cell-driven ministry or the transition is doomed to fail. To succeed, a church must undergo the cultural shift of pastors *staffing* programs developed by the staff of a church for action within the church building to meet the ministry needs of its membership, to pastors *equipping* the saints to do the work of the ministry organically in small groups in the everyday rhythms of life, which extend beyond the four walls of a building. This, essentially, is the difference between the attractional-event and program-driven church, and the missional cell-driven church.

What Grace Church Elders-Pastors Learned From Steve Timmis

The first thing Timmis said that resonated with our elders, in particular, is *there is no specific model of ministry that is God's model*. In other words, events and programs are not wrong and cell ministry right. Rather church leaders need to wrestle with how to do life-on-life together on mission, *regardless of the ministry model*. Some of our elders needed to hear these words before they were willing to accept Timmis' critique of events and programs compared to his explanation of the viability of the missional community model. The elders collectively embraced his comment that the role of leadership is to figure out what will work best to make disciples who make disciples in a given cultural context, and that small groups are effective at achieving this goal.¹²

Following the interview, the Vice Chair of our elders asked, "If Pastor Ryan were to leave or get hit by a bus, would we choose to continue with the missional and cell-driven model at Grace Church?" This elder, whom I refer to as Barnabas in chapter one, emphasized if the answer is no, then per Timmis the church has not fully transitioned. Our leadership team realized from this interview that we need a strategy for transforming

12. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

the culture of our church. Timmis said that leadership needs to be culture creators, causing a culture shift so that this new way of doing ministry becomes part of the DNA of our people. Our elders agree we need a strategic method to bring about change comparable to what Timmis recommends: 1) preach it and teach it; 2) pray it and sing it; 3) model it and mentor it; 4) structure and resource it; and 5) repeat.¹³

Following the insights from this interview, our elders and pastors recognized our need to develop a more systematic approach of equipping the saints and of structuring / resourcing leaders for making disciples, so that groups can more organically do life-on-life together on mission. We have a system of leader development that has been created as a result of my research, which includes: coaching; a monthly cell leader equipping session; and one-on-one mentoring by each Home Community (HC) leader to be accomplished with an apprentice. But this system is hit-and-miss depending on the quality of equipping and modeling-mentoring by the HC leader of a group.

Our leaders have come to realize the benefit of purposeful adult discipleship classes: 1) to systematically equip adults and leaders with the information needed to become disciples who make disciples in missional HC groups, 2) to create opportunity for people to develop relationships with more people in the church outside of their HC, and 3) to encourage cross-pollination of the discussion of ideas by teachers and people from different groups. As members from various HC groups share with different people in classes about what is happening in their lives or groups, this could generate excitement and spark ideas for how to live missionally as HCs in neighborhoods, life-on-life. Therefore, it is my recommendation that our elders and pastors reinstate adult classes as part of our structure to equip the saints and support leader development.

We were encouraged by Timmis' vision for cell groups to be multigenerational, to meet needs of men, women, and children together in community. But our elders

13. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

commented that Timmis did not talk about the nuances of how to do this in small group community, other than to lead by example. And so the question of whether we should continue our mid-week AWANA and youth programs was still up in the air at this point in the process. We inferred that Timmis would recommend that if our AWANA and youth programs are *creating opportunities* for children and youth to do life-on-life together on mission, then these ministries should continue. So how do our elders and pastors answer this question? If something like AWANA, Youth Group or MOPs were to continue, our elders inferred from Timmis that some of our cells could form around these ministries to shepherd and serve these programs with intentionality.¹⁴ This challenged our status quo, as our cell groups have been strictly formed *based on location*, with the exception of a Youth Leadership HC, which was formed around the Youth Pastor in order for him to make disciples that serve High School HCs and youth group. This was done with intentionality, and is bearing fruit. Could the same be done for AWANA?

These considerations bring up a point of contention for our elders (and a few members of Grace), which has to do with the question if we should establish HCs strictly based on *location* or based on *affinity*. Since 2012, HCs have developed based on location, but this unnecessarily created roadblocks for those trying to enthusiastically embrace the missional cell-driven model. When friends who live close to one another are forced to join different groups because they live on either side of a line on a map, they face a choice: 1) reluctantly follow leadership, 2) ignore leadership, or 3) avoid joining a group. When leaders disagree concerning whether the boundaries should be strictly followed, this amplifies the problem for the leader trying to convince a lay person to adhere to something that leader does not necessarily agree with.

Steve Timmis' solution is *don't make this an either / or* for people, rather allow for a "glorious flexibility" of decision-making concerning how groups are formed. As

14. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

mentioned above, he suggests a group form around what he calls “gospel initiatives,” meaning a ministry or a mission like MOPs, AWANA, youth group, a neighborhood, a people group (like Somolian refugees living in High Point, a location in West Seattle), or reaching children and their parents at a particular school.¹⁵ By lifting regulations of strict lines on a map (while still having guidelines of groups being mixed gender and multigenerational) and by forming missional HCs based on location and / or a common mission, groups will form more easily, organically, and possibly grow faster as leaders are empowered to become catalytic leaders who focus more on disciple-making rather than on convincing people to join groups based solely on location.

In summary, the insights our elders gained from Steve Timmis are that we need to structure, resource, equip, and mobilize our people to more effectively make disciples in missional Home Communities and children’s ministry. Thus, following this interview I proposed to our elders that we resurrect Sunday morning adult discipleship classes with this purpose in mind. And I have proposed that we form groups, flexibly, around location and / or gospel initiatives. At this juncture, the elders recognized the need to listen to the remaining interviews for further coaching.

What Grace Church Elders-Pastors Learned From Joel Comiskey

Before our leadership team listened to Comiskey’s interview, I explained that he is the only pastor of the four that I interviewed who is a pure “cell-group” church leader, advocate, and coach. The rest of the interviewees are associated with Acts 29 Network of church planters, and generally refer to cell groups as Missional Communities. To help the elders understand my line of questioning with Comiskey, I explained there are at least two ways to structure a cell-group church. The first is to develop IG cell groups (intergenerational, mixed-gender, and with children and youth, much like what Steve

15. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

Timmis advocates). The second is to develop cells based on affinity: singles, the elderly, children's cells, youth cells, men's cells, women's cells, and intergenerational cell groups. I explained to our elders that I do not believe it would be wise to develop groups based strictly on affinity, because then we might as well just have a program-driven church as we had before with multiple different programs for each family member, which could contribute to divided households. This is a problem we had already solved and our elders agreed (before listening to the Comiskey interview) that our goal is to maintain mixed-gender multigenerational groups. But the question we needed to answer had to do with children's ministry. If we chose to end our mid-week program, how could we do children's ministry during cell-group meetings in the context of intergenerational cells? If we maintained our mid-week children's ministry, how could we re-format this ministry to create a children's environment of cell and celebration?

From Comiskey, our elders and pastors determined that the success of a cell-driven church depends on the elemental quality of: celebration, cell, coaching, and equipping. They agreed Sunday worship (celebration) should continue. But a few elders failed to see how cell groups are different from bible studies. And so concerning the question of how to form groups (based on location or affinity, etc.), Comiskey opined that groups should be similar with flexibility based on the definition of a cell (quoted previously).¹⁶ Having a clear definition solves this problem; it allows flexibility within sideboards of orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

Following this interview, the elders collectively wrote a definition of a missional HC to be incorporated into our website and publications, along with a graphic to depict in simple form what we are trying to accomplish through these groups (see figure 4). The definition reads,

16. Joel Comiskey, interview by author, via Zoom, Seattle, July 6, 2016, recorded on iPhone, transcript in Appendix D.

Missional Home Communities: are small groups that meet regularly for the purpose of mutual edification and the application of Scripture to be lived out as an everyday community (Acts 2:42-47; Ephesians 4:11-16). The group functions as a mini-church with the leader shepherding the group to become a *family of servant missionaries* who make disciples that make disciples and multiply (Matthew 18:19-20; 1 Peter 2:9).¹⁷

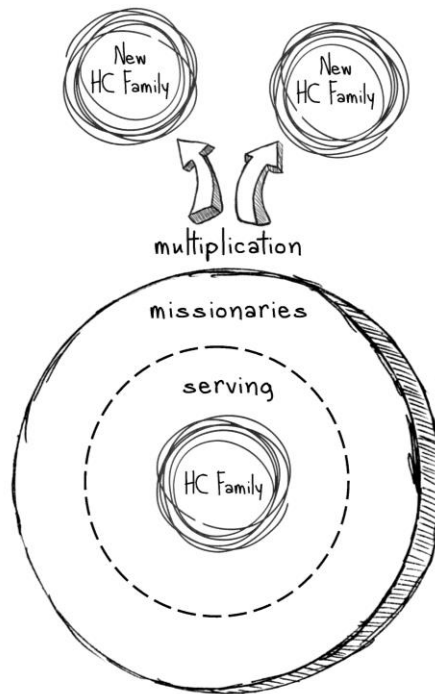


Figure 4: Missional HCs: a family of servant missionaries that multiply.¹⁸

A key point Comiskey made, which resonated with our elders and pastors, is that we ought to focus on *equipping the saints* to do the ministry. Comiskey emphasized “one equipping, with many ways to equip,”¹⁹ (which I outlined previously in chapter four).

During the interview the question of continuing AWANA was asked, and our elders understood from Comiskey’s answer that this question is a genuine struggle for any church wishing to make the transition from programs to cell ministry. The solution,

17. Elders of Grace Church Seattle, *Definition of a Two-Winged or Cell-Group Church* (Seattle, WA: Grace Church, 2016), compiled by author, see Appendix F.

18. Image by Kathie Varney (Grace Church Seattle, December 2016), inspired by Bill Beckham “The Church With Two Wings” in *Church Without Walls*, ed. Michael Green (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2002), 29; see also Jeff Vanderstelt, *Saturate: Being Disciples of Jesus in the Everyday Stuff of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 133-146.

19. Comiskey, interview by author, via Zoom, Seattle, July 6, 2016.

according to Comiskey, is to continue a hybrid ministry until the cell ministry replaces the need for the program. And so if our goal is to end the AWANA program and include children in intergenerational cell groups, then Comiskey recommends that we take a couple years, communicate our goal with the key leaders of AWANA and with the parents, and encourage them to participate in an intergenerational Home Community as we develop children's workers who can do children's cell lessons within intergenerational group meetings while the adults have their own separate discussion.²⁰

Our elders concluded that if we were to follow Comiskey's advice, we may lose some families through the transition, but we would be able to double-down on equipping and leader development through resurrecting the Sunday school and School of Theology classes to enrich education and cross-cell interactions. If we were to do this, we would be more purposeful in developing a systematic discipleship teaching track, similar to Comiskey's book series. And if we resurrected these children and adult classes, this would create more opportunities for people to utilize their gifts in teaching.

In summary, Joel Comiskey reinforced for our elders and pastors that we need to shore up our equipping process. Comiskey also helped us strategize for how to replace AWANA. If this is the direction we choose to go, then my recommendation would be that our Children's Pastor and Youth Pastor shift their job descriptions to become equippers of adults, training children's workers to lead children's cell-group discussions during an intergenerational Home Community meeting, strategically linking the children's cell-lesson to what is taught during Children's Church on Sunday mornings. This would simplify everything in our church, and eliminate competition between programs, though I am not entirely convinced that this would be the best decision for Grace at this time.

The alternative is to maintain status quo for missional Home Communities and transition the youth and children's ministry on Wednesday evenings (or to Sunday

20. Comiskey, interview by author, via Zoom, Seattle, July 6, 2016.

evenings) to become a cell-celebration version of youth and family ministry that takes place at the church building. This would require one third of the volunteers of AWANA and Youth Group combined, and effectively meet the needs of children for a large group celebration while also teaching our children the DNA of small group cell ministry. Before I made a recommendation to the elders, the elders and pastors decided to listen to the next two interviews together.

What Grace Church Elders-Pastors Learned From Dan Braga

The elders and pastors appreciated Braga's reasoning for why he adheres to the missional and cell-driven model of ministry over events and programs. What resonated most is his statement that attractional-events and programs work to create converts, but with "an entrenched immaturity" as Christians are taught to *go, sit, listen and watch* while the mouth-piece and a few hands do their job. The big idea the elders took away from this interview is the attractional model is not as good at developing mature disciples *who make disciples* as compared to a more personal, missional, and small group approach. Braga outlined for our leadership that there are three emphases of his church: Sunday worship gathering, Home Gatherings (HGs), and Leadership Development.²¹

What we discerned by listening to this interview, and the Comiskey interview, is that there is a difference between coaching and equipping. Equipping involves teaching information and modeling how to apply that information through apprenticeship and mentoring. Coaching involves shepherding leaders who have been equipped, encouraging them, and holding them accountable as they shepherd their families and small groups. And so Braga's interview solidified for our elders and pastors that we ought to develop a more purposeful School of Theology and Sunday school curriculum,

21. Dan Braga, interview by author, Burien, WA June 20, 2016, recorded on iPhone, transcript in Appendix C.

specifically for discipleship and leader development, which coincides with what we are trying to accomplish through missional HCs.

After listening to this interview it became painfully obvious that not all of our elders were completely sold on our transition to the missional and cell-driven model. Again, Barnabas asked, “Are we all in on this model, regardless if Pastor Ryan were here?” We sat in awkward silence for about fifteen seconds, and so I pressed the point. Enthusiastically nine out of ten affirmed the cell-driven model as our structure, but Doubting Thomas folded his arms and said, “I still don’t know what I am saying yes to.” And so I walked him through the following story.

I recently had a meeting with a woman in her 80s who had been part of this church for 40 years. Her family transferred to this church in the 1970s because it had the best children’s program and worship ministry in town. She recently made the decision to leave because the music has changed and her programs have been “taken away” as she put it, she added, “Now there’s nothing for me.” She described her remembrance of church life at Grace in the 1980’s and 90’s, when she could come to the church building for an event or program or to be entertained and see her friends.

I asked the woman, “How are you serving people in this church?” She said, “I made calls for nursery workers for 35 years.” I asked, “Have you led anyone to Christ?” She said, “No.” I asked, “Are you discipling anyone?” She said, “What do you mean?” I explained that the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 calls for each of us to be involved in disciple-making. Then I asked her how she had been trained to make disciples or how she had participated in making disciples in the life of this church. She had a puzzled look on her face. After a long pause I explained, “If you haven’t led anyone to Christ, and if you are not helping to make disciples, and if you haven’t learned that by now, then you are not a mature Christian.” As I told the story, one of our elders said, “I bet *that* made her happy.” I described that she came into my office angry, to

lecture me, and to demand we make changes or else. I explained that after politely listening for 30 minutes, I made the statement to which she responded by changing her tune, and the next 45 minutes was a pleasant interaction.

I shared with the elders that this story illustrates the problem Grace Church has faced for twenty or thirty years. Our church has focused on the crowd and neglected to make disciples of individuals from the crowd, teaching them to do life-on-life together in missional small group communities. I explained that the structure of the cell-driven church, in particular the “two-wings” of the church (Sunday worship and missional HCs) is the structure I have been implementing and leading Grace Church toward for the past six years, in order to guide our leaders to make disciples who learn to make disciples.

After sharing this story and explaining the reason for the transition, our elders and pastors unanimously agreed (again for the third time since June 2014) that this is our structure moving forward: Cell and Celebration. And we unanimously agreed, based on the Comiskey and Braga interviews that we need to shore up our equipping process in both curriculum and how we equip our people. We agreed we need a basic metrics of success for each HC to measure its effectiveness at making disciples that make disciples. I explained that Jeff Vanderstelt’s interview would help us develop a metrics of measurement for success in leading Home Communities. In the meantime, I worked with our Elder-Chair and Vice-Chairman to finalize two covenants: one for the elders defining their roles and responsibilities in the cell-driven structure (see Appendix G); and the *Defining your Home Community: HC Covenant* (see Appendix H) is designed to help groups think through what they will set out to accomplish each year corresponding to a vision casting sermon to be preached each September entitled “Why we do what we do and you” (the idea for this second document was inspired by Vanderstelt’s *Saturate*).²²

22. Vanderstelt, *Saturate*, 235-246.

The groups that are doing well have leaders that believe in our system. The Home Communities that are struggling are those with leaders who are still skeptical of our structural changes or who don't really understand what we are trying to accomplish, which comes back to the need for our elders and pastors to own our system as if it were their idea. Hence the need for Grace Church elders to listen to these interviews to be inspired by leaders that have gone before us, and hence the need for modeling and mentoring to see a missional HC in action.

What Grace Church Elders-Pastors Learned From Jeff Vanderstelt

From Vanderstelt, our elders came to discern a set of metrics to measure the success of a missional Home Community. Barnabas wanted to re-listen to a part of the interview that encapsulates Vanderstelt's metrics in which he said,

...we first of all try to assess each Missional Community to figure out what they need. ...we assess them on how good are they at loving like family? How good are they at serving in tangible forms to show the Kingdom of God breaking into the world...with unbelievers? And then how effective are they in a non-believing context reaching lost people?²³

In summary, missional Home Communities are *families of servant missionaries that multiply*. Since reading *Saturate* by Vanderstelt in 2015, this has developed into a pithy slogan we use in our documentation,²⁴ and which was reinforced by this interview. On an official basis, this has not been declared as our metrics of measuring success, but this has been the basis of several sermons and for how our missional Home Community covenants have been written. This has also inspired the imagery used on the cover of our church informational booklet and on our website to depict how a Home Community forms and multiplies (see Figure 4 above).

23. Jeff Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016, recorded on iPhone, transcript in Appendix E.

24. Vanderstelt, *Saturate*, 143-246.

Vanderstelt's interview hinted at nuances to the application of these principles and measurement of this metrics for each individual Missional Community group leader at Doxa, but he didn't define the details and so our elders wished he would have fleshed this out a bit more to help us in our context. For Grace Church, this is where coaching will play a vital role in holding HC leaders accountable and for guiding them in shepherding their groups to become families of servant missionaries that multiply. Comiskey excels in coaching, which is why our coaches are reading his book *How to Be a Great Cell Group Coach*. It has helped us distinguish between coaching as pastoral care versus administration guidance. Administrative accountability is important for how Grace Church forms groups, while zone coaches must also shepherd the shepherds to model servant leadership and pastoral care that builds successful Home Community cell-group leaders.²⁵

Concerning equipping and applying a realizable set of metrics, following this interview our elders agreed that: (1) we need to reestablish some kind of adult discipleship process through classes to supplement equipping related to learning a Christian worldview; (2) each HC leader needs to invest in one disciple as an apprentice as a part of equipping through modeling and mentoring how to make disciples in the missional HC context; (3) each of our leaders needs to shepherd their group to become a family of servant missionaries with the goal of multiplication; and finally, (4) each zone coach needs to shepherd the hearts of HC leaders and hold them accountable to the above in order to prepare them to achieve healthy group multiplication.

This interview helped our elders and pastors discover we have a difference of opinion concerning how to do children's ministry in a cell-driven structure. Vanderstelt believes AWANA can be quite effective for younger children *if* the ministry is running

25. Joel Comiskey, *How To Be a Great Cell Group Coach: Practical Insight for Supporting and Mentoring Cell Group Leaders* (Houston, TX: Cell Group Resources, 2003), 57.

well, emphasizing outreach and discipleship. But his concern is families have too many things they are involved in like sports or after school activities, which leaves little margin for both Home Community and AWANA. He opined, “I would rather take the things that are already going on in their world and then train them how to do those things with more gospel intentionality than they’re probably used to.”²⁶ This statement helped our elders realize we are at a crossroads: they asked, why change AWANA if it is going well? But the pastoral staff doesn’t believe it is going well for several reasons. First, we have become the church down the street to which other churches without children’s ministry send their children (and these are often home school children who tend to not know unbelievers, thus true outreach is not necessarily being achieved). It takes 48 leaders to serve 70-100 children in AWANA; add to this that it takes 18 leaders per week (or 67 adults on rotation) to run Children’s Church on Sundays, 12 leaders to run Youth Group, and 21 adults to help run Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPs). That is 148 different positions that need to be filled by a church of 200 adults, which often leads to round pegs filling square holes. In other words, AWANA has become the biggest drain of people resources in our church, which inadvertently creates competition between this program and involvement in missional HCs. Second, AWANA creates a wonderful and safe Christian environment for children to learn Scripture, but our long-term goal is to involve children with their parent’s in an intergenerational HC. To do this will take time as we need to form in children, and their parents, this kind of DNA of how to do church. Finally, I explained to the elders AWANA is not necessarily inspiring our children to reach out to their friends in the name of Jesus. Thus, many of our children are living in a Christian bubble. Discipleship in terms of scripture memory *is* happening, but not in terms of teaching children to become disciple-makers of unbelievers. When this was realized, the elders began to see the need to make changes.

26. Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016.

Staff Recommendations for Changes Concerning Children's Ministry

I am proposing two options based on my research to resolve this problem. The first option I will present in this work is called "Plan B" because this is the order in which the staff presented these options to the elders. Plan B is a true "Two Winged Church" emphasizing Cell and Celebration. This plan would be to completely remove any program during the week and instead focus on children's ministry through Sunday school and IG cells. We would still call groups missional Home Communities following the structure of the 4 Ws (welcome, worship, Word, and works), involving children in everything but the time in the Word; the adults would be in one room focusing on questions related to the sermon or discipleship materials while the children would be in another room with a trained leader guiding them through questions related to Children's Church (which is like Sunday school during the worship service). At the end of the evening, the children would join the adults for "works" or to wrap up the evening with prayer and announcements about the community life of the group in order to serve one another and be on mission throughout the week.

This would simplify our structure, and require a third of the current workers for children's and youth ministry (approximately 40 workers total per week for Sunday school, children's church, and children's workers in IG cell groups). By ending the AWANA program: 1) Sunday school, Children's Church, and the small group curriculum would be synchronized; and 2) children and parents would be freed up to spend more time on everyday mission in the everyday rhythms of life engaging non-Christians.

To do this well would require that the Children and Youth Pastor shift their focus from AWANA and youth group to equipping adults to lead children's cell discuss during intergenerational missional HC meetings. And so our adult discipleship classes on Sunday morning would reflect this focus for those workers. Additionally, in the long term our church would shift from two pastors leading this work to one "Family Pastor."

The other option I call “Plan A” – which is to retain a mid-week ministry (or move it to Sunday evenings), but transform it into a family night called “Youth DNA” to emphasize Celebration and Cell with a focus on children and youth (I call this “Plan A” because if “Plan B” is the ultimate goal, “Plan A” can be a transitional step to train our leaders, helpers, and families in the DNA of children’s cell ministry in preparation to develop IG cells). Instead of running AWANA and Youth Group with 60 adult leaders, “Youth DNA” would require 20 adult volunteers. This would be for children from kindergarten through eighth grade from 5:30-7:00pm, and High School (HS) DNA from 7:00-8:30pm (the HS-DNA would focus on cell ministry for high school students to nurture their hearts and disciple them to serve children during Youth DNA as an apprentice of an adult leader in how to lead a children’s cell group).

The night would be segmented into the 4 Ws on a larger scale, somewhat like our current youth group meetings. The Family Pastor would conduct large group games or icebreakers for 10-15 minutes (welcome), followed by worship for 20-25 minutes led by high school students and adults (worship). Next a speaker would give a 10 minute lesson / testimony related to the scripture used in Children’s Church on Sunday, followed by a breakout time in cells of 8-12 students led by an adult and his or her teenage apprentice (Word). These cells would spread throughout the building as small groups for 25-30 minutes. Following small group time, everyone would gather at the end for announcements, a song, and a final challenge to go be missional (works / wrap-up).

The leaders of these groups would have been equipped in three ways. The first is through equipping classes (conducted during the summer or as seminars). The second is by participating in an intergenerational HC group with the goal of serving Youth DNA as their missional focus. Currently one of these groups exists, which is led by our Youth Pastor to serve the youth ministry. This group is geared up to multiply in the fall, and one or two additional groups are in process of forming with the missional

focus of serving Youth DNA. As the Youth Pastor transitions to the Family Pastor role, he will take on more of a coaching role with the leaders of these groups. By developing three or more groups based on location (North, Central, and South Zones), members of these groups would be able to partake in an everyday HC family, based on location, that works together to serve children and youth as servant missionaries. The third way equipping would take place is on the job training. An adult leader would learn by doing and by mentoring an apprentice (high school student) to become disciple-makers of children. As teenagers learn to make disciples in small groups, they will learn a skill-set that can be utilized beyond High School into college and the real world.

As it currently stands, our leadership does not allow for Home Communities to meet on Wednesdays in order to set aside that time for children and youth ministry. If this ministry were to shift to Sunday evenings, then Home Communities would be allowed to meet on Wednesdays and our church would be a true Two-Winged church with a structure very similar to Doxa led by Jeff Vanderstelt. In such a context, missional Home Communities would have a meeting time during the week, in a home, and then they would be freed up from doing programs during the week so that they could focus on serving each other, recreating together, enjoying meals with each other, missionally engaging neighbors individually or as a team, and living missionally in the everyday rhythms of life in what they already have going on.²⁷ This would create a culture like what Timmis and Chester describe, “Our lives *are* the evangelistic events. Our life together is the apologetic.”²⁸

Regardless of which method of cell ministry for children and youth that our elders and pastors of Grace Church choose (option A or B), this last quote by Timmis and Chester gets at the heart of the matter. If church programs create so much busyness for

27. Vanderstelt, *Saturate*, 167-228; see also Chester and Timmis, *Everyday Church*, 89-92.

28. Chester and Timmis, *Everyday Church*, 89.

Christians that they don't have time to develop intimate and healthy, Christ-centered relationships with each other, then how can they expect non-Christians to want to join their community? The structure needs to be simple. The vision needs to be clear. Equipping needs to be intentional. Leadership needs to model healthy community that saturates their groups forming intimate bonds...and the rest organically flows from there.

A Pastor Should Have a Vision and a Strategy for Recontextualization

If I were coaching a new senior pastor about how to transition an attractional-events and program-driven church to become a missional and cell-driven church, I would advise the pastor to have a clear vision and simple strategy from the beginning. Pastors will do better if the road is mapped out for their leadership for how to accomplish their goals in a new context. In my experience, lay leaders often follow a plan if it is simple, clear, and consistently implemented. So firstly, I would advise that a potential new senior pastor (before the interviews) seek the Lord to discern if one is called to lead that particular church. Secondly, if one does feel called to lead a particular church, then that pastor needs to discern the Lord's vision through prayer specifically concerning that church. Thirdly, a pastor should develop a strategy for how to lead that church to fulfill the vision. And finally, during the interview process (or if already hired but desiring to transition their church) the pastor should lay out the vision and strategy for the church leadership, presenting with humility and recognizing that the Spirit of the Lord needs to be sought by the new senior pastor and leadership team together, so that the elders, pastors, and deacons can lead the church in unity under a Christ-centered vision of how to make disciples who make disciples pragmatically, without compromise, and in *their* specific cultural context.

If the potential pastor believes a transition from attractional-events and programs into missional cell-ministry is the Lord's vision for that church, then the pastor needs to

realize that whereas during the interviews everyone may get excited over the new direction, this does not necessarily mean the leadership understands the vision and how to practically implement the changes required for recontextualization. Each church has its own DNA and ways of doing ministry. And so I would advise the potential senior pastor to be realistic in the interviews and lay out not only a vision, but also the pastor's strategy to work with the leadership to bring about change. This pastor should explain that it takes five to seven years to fully transition a church from attractional-events and programs to the missional cell-driven model.²⁹ I would advise that the potential new pastor focus on *transitioning the culture of the church*, and not just changing structures. And so I would advise that the pastor walk the leadership team, during the interview process, through the recontextualization chart (see chapter one), stating that this would be a base-line filter used to guide the leadership through decision making. Of special concern are questions and considerations such as: what is? What ought to be? What needs to stay? What needs to go? What needs to change? And, how quickly to make those decisions in order to complete the transition? One must realize recontextualization is a continuous process; people and culture change, and so flexibility with humility is required by all in leadership in order to remain united.

With the vision focused on transition to a new cell-driven model of disciple-making, the primary goal from the beginning should be to equip and train key leaders to lead cell groups. I would advise that the potential new senior pastor lay out a strategy for equipping leadership, which should begin with the elders and pastors. This strategy should focus on five activities: prayer, preaching and teaching, equipping, modeling, and coaching. I recommend that the leadership of a local church in North America never use the term "cell" group, but rather something akin to "Home Community" as the former takes on a negative connotation in the American culture.

29. Comiskey, interview by author, via Zoom, Seattle, July 6, 2016.

Step One of a Five-Fold Strategy of Transition: Prayer

In a conversation with Jeff Vanderstelt, he said something to the effect that often pastors focus on Acts 2 (mission) before doing the work of Acts 1 (prayer). This is backwards. He opined prayer ought to be the first priority (Acts 1) so that the Spirit can guide and empower the work of ministry (Acts 2). Comiskey confirms this perspective, “As you spend time in His presence, you’ll make better plans, know how to handle each situation...”³⁰ Additionally, Mark Hoeffner believes that if a leadership team is not unified, then one or more people on that team are not seeking the Lord. But if that team seeks God’s will *together*, it is then that the Holy Spirit will unify the team.³¹

After submitting a survey to thousands of cell leaders about what makes a healthy cell church, Pastor Jim Egli said, “If you want a thriving small group system...the stats say that it is actually more important that you teach on prayer than that you emphasize people joining groups.”³² Scripturally speaking, revival begins with the pursuit of God. And as A.W. Tozer said, “We pursue God because, and only because, He has first put an urge within us that spurs us to the pursuit.”³³ To not pursue God in prayer is to busy oneself with ministry devoid of Holy Spirit power, and then at the end of the day a pastor feels guilt for lack of a relationship with the Lord, which if continued leads to burnout. If a pastor is to inspire the people of the church to live for Jesus, the inspiration must come from the work of the Spirit of God in the people in that church.

I am convinced that I could preach the exact same sermon, or facilitate the exact same cell-group discussion, but the effectiveness of that discussion or sermon directly corresponds to the time I have spent seeking the Lord in prayer. The same is true for a

30. Joel Comiskey, *How To Lead A Great Cell Group Meeting: So People Want To Come Back* (Houston, TX: Touch, 2001), 25.

31. Mark Hoeffner, “CBNorthwest Relational Elder Training” (seminar, Grace Baptist Church, White Salmon, WA., 15 November 2009).

32. Jim Egli, “Walk the Group Walk, More than You Talk the Group Talk,” *Joel Comiskey Group*, 1 November, 2016, accessed December 20, 2016, http://joelcomiskeygroup.com/blog_2/2016/11/01/walk-the-group-walk-more-than-you-talk-the-group-talk/.

33. A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1998), 11.

leadership team. As leaders lead together, their overall effectiveness in leading the church is dependent on their individual prayer life and prayer together, as a team. As described in Acts 6, one role of key leaders of a church is to focus on prayer and the ministry of the Word. Thus, elder and pastor teams must make prayer a priority. Thus I advise a new senior pastor spend time in prayer and the Word, every day, before engaging in other administrative or pastoral duties. Secondly, I advise a pastor set aside time with staff to be in prayer weekly, if not daily. Third, I advise that the senior pastor lead the elders to make prayer a priority in elder meetings before talking about church business. This will save many headaches, and cause the team to become more like a family. This will enhance their service and help them become servant leaders.

Step Two of a Five-Fold Strategy of Transition: Preaching-Teaching

Preaching and teaching are similar to one another with the distinction that preaching leads a congregation to worship the Lord. Both are essential ways for a minister to cast a vision and equip a church. The goal from the pulpit should be for the preacher to teach people the Scriptures, giving ideas for how to live out the gospel in the everyday rhythms of life as a church community, together to inspire people in corporate worship and celebration, and to live a lifestyle of worship that is pleasing to the Lord.

One of the first things I recommend a new senior pastor do when transitioning to missional and cell-driven ministry is to *not* talk about the transition with anyone other than the leadership until the leadership is living out the vision. During the interview process the vision should have been laid out, but to cast a vision for transition too early for the rest of the church could bring confusion, especially if some latch on to the idea and become discontent with leadership because they do not observe in practice what they are hearing about from the pulpit.

Regarding which ministries and programs to cut, a new pastor should not talk about this with the leadership in absolute terms; rather, focus on preaching and allowing all ministries and programs to continue until various a ministry or program: 1) dies a natural death, 2) warrants reason for immediately being cut because it is draining lifeblood from the church,³⁴ or 3) the need for that particular ministry or program is replaced by cell groups. For example, once the cell-driven system is functioning, group members start visiting each other in hospitals or nursing homes and effectively replace the need for a visitation ministry. Once the need for women's or men's accountability is met by the cells, then women's or men's ministry programs can end. The same is true for children's and youth ministry – assuming the church leadership chooses to end mid-week programs in favor of intergenerational cell groups.³⁵ But as Vanderstelt advises, don't cut a ministry that brings lifeblood into the body – hence why it might be important to keep a mid-week (or Sunday night) children's and youth program.³⁶

Because it takes about five to seven years for cell groups to replace the need for programs, and since developing leaders and coaches is essential for developing groups, for the first couple years it is advisable for a new senior pastor to focus on preaching and teaching, plus equipping the elders and staff in theology and cell-methodology.

From the pulpit I would advise a new senior pastor preach Jesus, the Gospels, and the New Testament. Preach the Great Commandment, Great Confession, and Great Commission to help the congregation understand the basis for and purpose of the church being missional (e.g., Mark 12:29-31; Matthew 16:13-20; 28:18-20; Mark 16:9-20; Luke 24:36-49; John 20:21-22; and Acts 1:8). Preach stories from the Old Testament to learn about leadership, delegation, and holding to the vision of the LORD despite opposition (e.g., Genesis 15, 17, 22, 37-47; Exodus 1-20; Daniel; Jonah; Nehemiah;

34. Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016.

35. Comiskey, interview by author, via Zoom, Seattle, July 6, 2016.

36. Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016.

etc.). Preach Amos and James for the congregation to gain a sense of justice and a heart of compassion for the poor. Preach Ephesians to bring the church together in unity under the gospel of Jesus Christ and to show congregants how they ought to live missionally together in community. Preach one of the Gospels to reintroduce the congregation to Jesus and to teach them about His Kingdom values and how He lived missionally in community with His disciples as he taught them to make disciples who reproduce themselves in others. And preach the Book of Acts to begin to point people to revival and action in community, to inspire the church to depend on the Holy Spirit as the church develops a hunger to live out the Great Commission. Meanwhile, the senior pastor should teach the elders and pastors (and any potential elders) everything that pastor knows about exegesis, theology, spiritual formation, shepherding, and cell-ministry so that the leadership can be more learned and prepared to lead the church.

Step Three of a Five-Fold Strategy of Transition: Equipping the Saints

A primary role of the senior pastor of a church is to *equip* the saints to do ministry (Ephesians 4:11-16). In particular, the lead pastor ought to equip elders and pastors to work together to shepherd a church as a team. I recommend the staff and elders be equipped in two ways. First, meet during the week as a pastoral staff for prayer, to disciple the leadership to minister to people, and specifically in their area of emphasis (youth, children's, worship, etc.). Second, pull together the elders for weekly meetings to teach and equip the same material. I understand time is valuable (elders need time with their families), and so I believe the best time for these elder meetings would be Sunday before Sunday school. I recommend a three-fold purpose of these meetings: 1) prayer, 2) equip for ministry by teaching practical theology, and 3) talk through case studies or shepherding situations for equipping. I would advise administrative decisions be delegated to deacons and church administrative staff as much as possible (Acts 6:1-6).

The reason I believe this equipping is important is because in my experience often elders (or deacons) of a local church have the highest level of authority, but have not necessarily been trained in how to shepherd and oversee the spiritual well-being of a church (Hebrews 13:17). Additionally, sometimes inherited leaders are not qualified in their character to lead (cf. 1 Timothy 3:1-7). And so I would remind a new pastor that it is the role of the pastor-teacher (or lead elder) to equip lay leaders to be shepherds, to teach, and to spiritually oversee the people by being the doctrine-keepers of a local church (Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 4:15-16; 5:17-19; Titus 1:5-9; Hebrews 13:7, 17; and 1 Peter 5:1-4). Therefore, these weekly meetings should be a priority.

One goal of this training should be to continually unite the elders and pastors theologically and methodologically for the purpose of releasing them to shepherd the church by leading their own cells and reproducing leaders in like kind. A second goal would be that these leaders take this information and disciple the church through classes or one-on-one discipleship. One of the classes I would recommend at the beginning would be a leader-in-training class for men and women to build a base of potential leaders to support the cell-group structure. These classes should be led by the new pastor at the beginning, as the other pastors-elders learn theology and the methodology of missional cell-driven ministry. They too can teach these classes as the system develops. I recommend two-years of leader training for every elder and pastor desiring to lead in a missional and cell-driven church. This should be led by the senior pastor as stated above, and repeated for incoming potential leaders and pastors.

Equipping Year 1: The books I recommend a senior pastor use during the first year of training are: *Live* by Joel Comiskey which teaches the elders and pastors eight essentials every Christian ought to know. I advise this book be used for new believers and be taught as Christianity 101. Second, I recommend the pastors and elders read and discuss *Spiritual Leadership* by J. Oswald Sanders. This book will help leaders

understand the character qualities expected of a leader. Third, I would advise they read *25 Basic Bible Studies Including Two Contents, Two Realities* by Francis Schaeffer, which is a summary of systematic theology. This would create solid resources to draw on for orthodoxy and orthopraxy (along with the previous books mentioned) for the leaders of the church. In order to develop a more robust philosophy of missional Christian living in community, I advise pastors and elders read the essay *Two Contents, Two Realities* before walking through the 25 bible studies. While reading this book, I recommend all pastors and elders write a half page doctrinal statement for each chapter per week, to be shared during the elder (and pastoral staff) meetings in order to discuss the theology and get every leader on the same page. Toward the end of the first year, I recommend a leadership team read *The Master Plan of Evangelism* by Robert Coleman to learn and understand Jesus' method of disciple-making.

Equipping Year 2: During the second year of the senior pastor's attempt to transition a church from programs to cell, I recommend key leaders walk through the *Real-Life Discipleship Training Manual* by Jim Putman as a follow up to *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. Putman's book provides a practical framework for a reproducible process of disciple-making in the small group context in the Twenty-First Century. His book stresses the need for lay ministers to personally invest in disciple-making. This should whet the appetite of the leadership team to learn to develop a cell structure.

Next I advise the senior pastor use *The Church That Multiplies: Growing a Healthy Cell Church in North America* by Comiskey for an introduction to the concept of cell ministry and how a cell-driven church can be structured. A new pastor needs to understand that this book will create a crossroads of sorts for the leadership team; up to this point it is likely the elders and pastors will not have fully understood missional and cell-driven ministry as I will explain in more detail below. While reading this book they will begin to realize the cost, as the average person's perspective on church will begin to

be dismantled and rebuilt in the cell-driven model. At this juncture, a pastor can expect a new level of push-back from leadership.

I recommend slowing down, making sure questions are answered. Once the leadership team works through their questions, individuals on the team will begin to be prepared to learn how to lead *their own* groups. At this point the leadership should be equipped in the theory of how to lead cell groups, but teaching information is insufficient by itself. Some will read the books, hear lectures, be inspired by sermons, and try to live what they are learning, but unless this kind of ministry is modeled and coached by a catalytic leader, some members will not fully grasp how to implement the vision. Others will prefer to continue to do ministry in the method they are comfortable with. And so from the beginning of implementation of the cell-driven structure, the pastor needs to lead the way by modeling *how* to do life-on-life together on mission.

Step Four of a Five-Fold Strategy of Transition: Modeling-Mentoring

During the process of equipping, and before the elders and pastors are released to lead cell groups, a new senior pastor should model *how* to live missionally in the cell structure with the senior leadership of the church (and their families) to prepare them to lead their own groups.³⁷ Because many North American Evangelical churches have the DNA of the attractional and program-driven model, the missional and cell-driven methodology is a foreign concept. I would advise a new senior pastor do something similar to what Billy Graham would have done if he had become the lead pastor of a local church. He said he would have called eight, ten, or twelve people around himself to meet, pray, and to teach them everything he knows about how to do ministry. And then after two years he would have released them to do the same.³⁸

37. Timmis, interview by author, West Seattle, March 14, 2016.

38. Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Spire, 1993), 116.

In relation to the rest of the church, the pastor should simply preach the Word on Sundays in order to develop a foundation for missional and cell-group ministry based on Jesus' life and ministry. The elders and pastors can teach adult discipleship classes in conjunction with what they are being taught by the senior pastor. Meanwhile, the pastor in a complementarian relationship³⁹ should lead the first cell group from day one, made up of the elders, pastors and their families. I agree with Comiskey that this level of modeling of cell-driven ministry is absolutely necessary for the success of the transition of a church from programs to cell.⁴⁰ To lead this group well and with purpose, I recommend senior pastor and co-leaders read *How To Lead A Great Cell Group Meeting* by Joel Comiskey before they start this group.

Given that the DNA of many North American Evangelical churches tend to be program-driven, cell ministry needs to be experienced and not just learned in a classroom. As mentioned in chapter one, the man I call Barnabas was skeptical about missional Home Communities effectively replacing the seven ministries he, his wife, and children were part of. It was not until he and his wife realized they were passing each other like ships in the night that they desired to lead a ministry together. They stopped leading the various silo ministries they participated in and joined my group for a year so that they could experience the difference. When they were released to start their own HC group with fresh eyes, they became staunch defenders of the effectiveness of the missional and cell-group model meeting the needs of the whole family, together on mission. Now his group is one of the healthiest of Grace Church. If I could have done it over (and the advice I would give to a new pastor), I would have pulled together my five

39. I take a complementarian view concerning elders and the Senior Pastor position in line with 1 Corinthians 11:3-16; 14:33b-35; and 1 Timothy 2:11-3:2, allowing for women to lead alongside male leadership in the church (cf. Acts 18:26). I believe a woman can do anything in the church that a non-elder can do, and I recognize not all pastors, churches, and denominations believe the same and allow for an egalitarian applications of the same texts in view of Galatians 3:28 and Acts 18:26. While one might differ with my interpretation and application of these texts, the principles of this thesis project are transferable to anyone in ministry.

40. Comiskey, interview by author, via Zoom, Seattle, July 6, 2016.

elders, two pastors, and their families on day one in order to model how to do life-on-life together on mission in a missional Home Community context.

When a new senior pastor lays out the vision for such a transition, I believe the pastor needs the elders and pastors to agree, up front, that they will participate in the first cell-group with the intention of being equipped to multiply and lead their own groups. I believe this is a requirement for the cell-driven church to be successful; every key leader needs to partake in a group in a cell-driven church, for in such a structure cell groups are *the* program of the church.⁴¹ I recommend the pastor give a realistic time-frame of one to three years for each leader to be developed to be able to successfully lead their own group, for multiplication depends on the individuals skill-set, experience, adaptability, and maturity in the Lord. The key purpose of a new pastor leading the first missional cell group directly with the other pastors, elders, and their families, is to model the culture-shift the pastor envisions for the rest of the church. Per Comiskey's advice, before groups are multiplied I recommend a new pastor develop a working definition of a cell group as a basic guideline for developing all future cells.⁴²

After defining what a cell group is, a new pastor should teach it to the group within the first few weeks and covenant together with the group to begin to learn to live as a family of servant missionaries with the goal of multiplication (see Jeff Vanderstelt's sample covenant in Appendix A and B of his book *Saturate*).⁴³ I would advise that the new pastor focus heavily on developing a family feel in the group for the first several months. Note that when a new pastor comes to the church he doesn't know anyone, and everyone is trying to put on their best face, so it takes time to break down walls and begin to learn to trust one another. In order to develop trust, the group needs to commit

41. Joel Comiskey, *The Church That Multiplies: Growing a Healthy Cell Church in North America*, (Moreno Valley, CA: Cell Church Solutions, 2007), 90-91.

42. Joel Comiskey, *Live: Experience Christ's Life* (Moreno Valley, CA: Cell Church Solutions, 2007), 37.

43. Vanderstelt, *Saturate*, 235-246.

to confidentiality, especially when the men and women divide up once per month for deeper accountability and nurturing of the soul.⁴⁴ As the needs of both men and women are met through the cell group, these meetings will replace the need for a separate men's or women's accountability group. The same can be said for children and youth, though adding children into cell meetings is a bit more complicated considering the leaders development needed to develop IG cells (see "Option B" above). In short, the pastor and leader team need to decide if they want to develop IG cells or continue a mid-week children's and youth program with elements of the two-wing church: celebration and cell. In advising a new pastor what to do, I would walk through the two options laid out above, and work with the leadership to discern what is best for that church.

For the development of leaders in the group, I recommend male leaders mentor the men, and female leaders mentor the women.⁴⁵ In choosing key leaders to disciple to lead their own group, I recommend the senior pastor and his wife work together with a couple, not telling them at first that they have been selected, but rather following the leader development process laid out by Jim Putman for informal discipleship that "...starts with 'You watch; I do' and moves to 'Let's do it together' and then to 'You do; I watch.'"⁴⁶ These simple principles can be followed for anything from leading a discussion, to doing icebreakers, to leading the prayer time, to visitation, to meeting with someone going through a difficult situation, to evangelism, etc. This kind of modeling is important in order to develop in lay people the DNA of a missional cell-driven ministry, empowering them to do the work of the ministry and to release them to do the same.

In the first six months to a year (as leaders rise to the surface) the pastor in complementarian leadership with co-leaders can begin to formalize the discipleship of

44. Dan Braga, interview by author, Burien, Washington, June 20, 2016; cf. Jeff Vanderstelt, interview by author, via Skype, Seattle, July 13, 2016.

45. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 21-35.

46. Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship: Building Churches that Make Disciples* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2010), 59.

these key potential leaders in conjunction with the classes and material being taught. At this time the senior pastor should announce within the group who the official co-leaders are, so that the group can begin to think about multiplication.

It is important for a new pastor to remind this leadership group of the stages they will naturally walk through as they become a family of servant missionaries who are intent on disciple-making. In the initial stages of a group, everyone will be polite, get acquainted and begin to trust each other, but inevitably problems and struggles will begin to surface and the group will encounter strains and enter the conflict stage. This will give the pastor the opportunity to shepherd the senior leadership of the church on how to handle conflict resolution.⁴⁷ As the group works through their issues, they will bond together as family, grow together spiritually, and begin to serve one another practically. As this happens they will begin to feel strengthened and see the need to make disciple-makers together in a community that benefits the whole. With the maturing of the group and with members utilizing their spiritual gifts in the missional HC, they will see that the cell group could replace many of the programs of the church.

Since the goal of a group is to become a family of servant missionaries that saturates their community with the gospel of Jesus Christ,⁴⁸ before multiplying the first group I would advise the pastor preach a sermon series related to one of three books: *Everyday Church* or *The Gospel Centered Church* by Steve Timmis and Tim Chester or *Saturate* by Jeff Vanderstelt. The goal would be three-fold: 1) to share the vision of missional cell-groups with the rest of the church; 2) for the leadership cell group to practice what is being preached; and 3) for the new groups to be launched toward the end of the sermon series. When the launching of new groups takes place, a coaching system will need to be developed for continued shepherding of leaders.

47. Lawrence Khong, *The Apostolic Cell Church: Practical Strategies for Growth and Outreach* (Singapore, SGP: TOUCH, 2000), 176-177.

48. Vanderstelt, *Saturate*, 237-239.

Step Five of a Five-Fold Strategy of Transition: Coaching

As cell-group ministry takes root, a senior pastor's role will change. From the beginning the pastor: 1) casts vision through preaching and teaching; 2) sets goals and trains leaders through staff and elder meetings; 3) starts the first cell group with the leadership team and their families; and 4) models and mentors for leaders how to lead a group. At this juncture the senior pastor assumes a new role as cell group *coach*.

Jim Egli of Vineyard Church in Urbana, Illinois writes, "The single most important element in the long-term growth of your small groups is the active, ongoing coaching of your group leaders."⁴⁹ He defines coaching as the support structure for all leaders, "...encouraging them, praying for them, and helping them solve their problems."⁵⁰ At the beginning a senior pastor will coach alone, but as cells multiply, the pastor will need to mentor capable leaders into coaching positions. This will become a coaching team. I advise a new pastor select potential coaches who have developed co-leaders and multiplied their cell successfully. I would also advise that this leader have the bandwidth to be able to shepherd cell leaders while also leading or participating in their own cell group. Pastor Mario Vega of Misión Cristiana Elim Internacional in El Salvador, advises,

The lead pastor...have a team to help guide the church. In the team meetings, the pastor will set goals, define strategies, and plan direction. The pastor continues his role of coach and mentor to those on his team. Team members take the pastors [sic] teaching and values to guide the rest of the cell structure. In this way, the lead pastor continues to be vitally linked to the cell vision.⁵¹

Pastor Egli states it is easy to diagram an organizational chart for coaching in the cell model. But to actually coach with purpose requires thoughtful planning, training, energy, and hard work.⁵² Therefore, I would advise a new pastor have his coaching

49. Jim Egli, "The Most Important Thing in Your Small Group System," *Joel Comiskey Group*, 31 October, 2016, accessed December 20, 2016, http://joelcomiskeygroup.com/blog_2/2016/10/31/the-most-important-thing-in-your-small-group-system/.

50. Jim Egli, "The Most Important Thing in Your Small Group System."

51. Mario Vega, "The Role of the Pastor in Cell Ministry," *Joel Comiskey Group*, 24 October, 2016, accessed December 20, 2016, http://joelcomiskeygroup.com/blog_2/2016/10/24/the-pastor-and-his-cell-work/.

52. Jim Egli, "The Most Important Thing in Your Small Group System."

team read through *How To Be A Great Cell Group Coach* by Joel Comiskey. Each cell group leader should feel they can come to their coach at any time. And the coach should intentionally connect with their assigned cell leader once per week. I recommend each coach have no more than four cell leaders they are coaching at any one time. And I recommend the coach connect with each cell leader and their apprentice concerning the materials listed under the second of this five-fold strategy. Some of these materials could have been learned through reading or in conjunction with a class, but the point is the material needs to be read and discussed in order to flesh out theory in practice.

In order to synchronize everyone's activities, I recommend the senior pastor be the head coach of this coaching structure. This structure should have male and female coaches working together, preferably the senior pastor and his wife, if at all possible, to work together to shepherd the other coaches. The head coach should meet weekly with each coach. And the pastor should pull all coaches together monthly in a cell-leader equipping seminar. During this seminar, the coaches should group leaders and co-leaders together based on zones. These trainings should focus on prayer, talking through potential problems groups face, vision casting, and ongoing training.

In summary, the first part of the five-fold strategy of recontextualization is *prayer*, which undergirds and empowers a culture shift within a church. The second part of the strategy is *preaching* to cast vision, to lead people to worship together, and to equip the church in the Word concerning missional living in the mold of Jesus and the Apostles. The third part of the strategy is *equipping* through teaching to develop elders, pastors, and lay leaders who share the vision of becoming disciple-makers. Equipping takes place through teaching classes, personal investment one-on-one, and in small group environments. The fourth part of the recontextualization strategy is for the pastor to *model* and *mentor* missional cell-driven ministry by leading an elder-pastor cell group with their families from the beginning of this kind of transition. And the final strategic

piece of the puzzle is for a pastor to implement a *coaching* structure to shepherd and guide cell leaders so that they are ministered to, encouraged, and held accountable as disciple-makers in the cell-driven structure. I believe this strategy for transitioning a church culture can work in most contexts, though as Chester and Timmis would put it, we need to be wary of “quick-fix solutions for every situation.”⁵³ This is true in relation to the implementation of a program or the transition to cell-driven ministry.

Conclusion

Every church, denomination, city, country, continent, and context is different, with variations of positive and negative effects from culture. And every church has a different set of circumstances to navigate when considering this transition. As seen in the interviews, there are many similarities between the ministries these pastors lead. What makes these ministries successful is the leader abandoned to the gospel of Jesus, sold to the vision to make disciples who reach their culture. Not everything in this work is entirely transferable to the ministry of your, the readers, context and experience. You might face obstacles I have yet to imagine. But I believe the problems described in this thesis are problems common to many evangelicals in a program-driven context.

My final piece of advice comes from a man I interacted with only a few times, Interim Pastor of Grace, Ralph Young. We met for lunch in fall 2009; I shared my vision to equip the elders to lead missional HCs to reach the neighborhood for Christ. He said, “It’s easy to put it on paper, it’s a lot harder to carry it out in reality.” What I have written about has had a positive effect at Grace, but people are more likely to follow a pastor if they see the vision lived out. And so this is my final piece of advice for any leader wishing to recontextualize their church, practice what you preach.

53. Steve Timmis and Tim Chester, *Gospel Centred Church: Becoming the Community God Wants You to Be* (USA: The Good Book Company, 2012), 44.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS OF PASTORS LEADING OR COACHING
CHURCHES TO BECOME CELL-GROUP TYPE CHURCHES

1. What is your name, current ministry, and title in that ministry?
2. What is your experience with the program and event's driven model?
3. What is your passion and motivation for leading your current ministry?
4. What is the biblical basis for the ministry method you are using?
5. When you made the decision to change your method of ministry from program to cell (cell also is called Missional Communities or Gospel Groups depending on the interviewee), what resistance, if any, did you face from peers or those within your church or organization? [Change this question slightly for the particular person being interviewed]
6. As a leader, how did you navigate these waters and keep your church or organization from sinking? What mistakes did you make? What did you do well?
7. When transitioning a church from programs to cell, how should a leader make decisions about what ministry programs to keep? Which ones to cut? And how quickly to completely transition?
8. How do you do leader development for a cell-group church?
9. How do you do women's or men's ministry and discipleship in a cell-group church?
10. How do you do children's ministry in a cell-group church?
11. How do you do youth ministry in a cell-group church?
12. Is there an advantage to doing some kind of hybrid of cell and program? For example doing AWANA plus youth group and then involve children in cell groups?

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW WITH STEVE TIMMIS

Author: "This is Ryan Faust, Doctor of Ministry Student at Gordon-Conwell Seminary and Pastor of Grace Church Seattle, and I am interviewing Steve Timmis, author of *Total Church* and *Everyday Church* on March 14th, 2016 for my thesis project. This is being recorded, and so I wanna ask you, do I have your permission to record this meeting?"

Steve Timmis: "You do."

Author: "Thank you. Alright, well, if you don't mind, what is your name, current ministry, and title of that ministry?"

Steve Timmis: "My name is Steve Timmis, and I have a dual role, I'm Executive Director of Acts 29, a diverse global family of churches planting churches and I am Senior Elder at the Crowded House in Sheffield."

Author: "What experience do you have with program and events driven model[s] within churches?"

Steve Timmis: "Um, quite a lot of experience in that I've been um, I've been a Christian for 48 years. So I've been involved in ministry for, active ministry and for supportive ministry the best part of 36 years. Um, so I grew up through my teenage years in a fairly traditional model, and I became the pastor of a church when I was 24 years old that had a fairly traditional approach to church, that is to events to which you invited people. So fairly extensive is a summary statement."

Author: "Okay. So what is your passion and your motivation for leading your current ministry?"

Steve Timmis: "Well my passion and motivation all spring from the gospel and the fame of Jesus, and I am aware that obviously that can be trite in that who's going to argue with that? Who's not going to say that? But that really is the case for me and I often talk about the Crowded House as being first and foremost a gospel initiative before it's a...it's not a model of church, it's not some kind of clever initiative or, it never has been that, it's been about the best way to reach people for Jesus. So that's my, that's really my passion and motivation. And I want to see, um, communities of light scattered throughout the dark world. And, so that, to quote Ephesians 5, 'Christ, rise o sleeper rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you.' And that's really what it is about, the beginning and the end. No more sophisticated than that."

Author: "Okay."

Steve Timmis: "I'm not a sociologist, and I'm not a kinda of a cultural analyst, I'm a...
I'm a gospel minister, first and foremost."

Author: "Okay, great. Well about your, um, style of ministry, so this is just a follow up
question to one of your earlier questions, do you have a building that you meet
at, or is it primarily within homes?"

Steve Timmis: "No, we do have a building."

Author: "Okay, alright, so if you could talk about that a little bit more."

Steve Timmis: "And, well we started off, and one of the important things, I think, generally in ministry, and this isn't relating to, uh, to this kind of cell group as you called them in the purpose of this study, um, it's just a general observation about ministry, generally, um is the fact that you have a very clear idear of kinda what your end point is, in terms of, um, you gotta know that in terms of principle to distinguish between the principle, the focal, which is the sharp focal point, and everything else, which is kind of expedience and necessary accoutrements, really. Um, and so when I started Crowded House, I started it as a vision to plant a network of household churches. And I remember famously saying, and this might even be incriminating, but I happened to do it quite publically, I remember famously saying, not famously in that lots of people heard it, but famously because it was a massive faux pas. And I said, 'If Crowded House ever has a building we'll of sold our vision short.' Uh, four years later we had a building. And some people did suggest we sold the vision short, in fact somebody set up an email account for me that said Steve@soldout.com. Um, and, it was a friend who did it, it was a joke. Uh, but um, but the, what it, because I had been adamant at the beginning it was a gospel initiative, as the situation developed, and as the situation grew, this became a gospel opportunity that we, that we couldn't refuse. And it was basically a dying church that asked us to basically come in and take them over. Um, and, and we felt an obligation to them as a group of elderly believers, godly, lovely, lovely men and women, uh, who just said, 'We don't want to close the door, you know, we wanna keep it open. And, and if we do close the door we don't want it to be just because the church has died but because people have been deployed all over the city.' And so [we] took [the] decision to kinda close down one of our household churches, and, throw in our lot with this dying church. And, uh, we got their building, as part of that deal as it were. And the work has grown from that. So our growth up until that point was quite, was quite slow. I mean there was growth but it wasn't kinda spectacular. The growth since that has not been spectacular in kinda US terms, we've been a small church. But in UK terms we've quite a large church. But we've seen a lot happen in terms of ministry, and churches being planted from that. So, so we ended up getting this building, but which we were very clear it's not gonna be the, um, that's not where all of our ministry is going to happen. We still want a devolved model, that is ministry happening out there in the community on the margins of the, on the front line."

Author: "So you said you took one of your gospel groups and you took that and combined it with this church at that church building. Did you still have gospel group meetings in houses?"

Steve Timmis: "Yes, yes we would."

Author: "Okay. And so that particular church is that called the Crowded House, or are all of them called the Crowded House together?"

Steve Timmis: "Well, we, they're all called the Crowded House and we have other congregations in different parts of, a couple different parts of the country. But, um, but that was the umbrella term, but they eventually, about six years later came...came in."

Author: "So then this is the place in Sheffield, the building that you meet at."

Steve Timmis: "Yes. That's where we have our gatherings."

Author: "Okay, and so then do you also have your own individual homes that you meet in during the week?"

Steve Timmis: "Um, yes, but you can't define them in terms of meetings. That's the question most people ask, but it's not essentially about a meeting at all. It's about doing "life-on-life together on mission." And that means that all of our small groups, and there's all sorts of word names that are used to describe those missional communities: "Cell Groups," "Gospel Communities" that was my preferred name, "Life Groups," you know, you name it, you can come up with a name for it and it's almost irrelevant. But, um, so those, let's call them Life Groups, because that's what we call them at the moment, but we're about to change the name to "Ministry Teams." Um, and so they do meet to eat, but they're not defined by their meeting, they're defined by their life-on-life together on mission."

Author: "So do they meet primarily based in neighborhoods? Is the mission based in a neighborhood..."

Steve Timmis: "General...generally, yes, yes. Not exclusively in that there are, there are groups of people that might be the people we are trying to reach, who aren't necessarily geographically defined. Like refugees, for example."

Author: "Okay. What's the biblical basis for this method of ministry that you're using?"

Steve Timmis: “Ah, that’s a question that, ah...I mean it’s...one of the things that...I will often refute any idea that this is a model of church, it really isn’t. It’s, you know, I’ll argue that case with anyone, it’s not a model. And um, so I’ll say to pastors of mega churches, you know I don’t have a beef with big churches, with mega churches, with giga-churches. You know, I just don’t have a beef with them at all. And, but I do say to them for every church you’ve gotta find a way of structuring yourself so you’re doing life-on-life together on mission. That, that’s critical. So you can get thousands of people into a building on a Sunday, or whatever day of the week you happen to meet, and that’s your choice you’re making. But, th...the...the essence of it, an...and this comes into the distinction, that is a historical distinction between the, that which is essentially church and that which belongs to the wellbeing of church. The “essay benny essay,” what the historical theologians have called it. And I think the essence of church is that which can flourish in any context, at any time, in any culture. Um, and so if you take a church that meets in a building like this for example, then then this is a cultural expression of church that is perfectly appropriate, there’s nothing wrong with it. But you couldn’t open a church like this in the middle of Riyadh, for example. But in terms of church being believers living life-on-life together on mission, then that’s how church has always been done. That’s how church always will be done, essentially, and that can flourish in any kind of context. So, so that’s why I say this isn’t a model, this is basically... So all we’re doing is we’re trying to structure ourselves so that believers living life-on-life together on mission is the sharp pointy bit, of who we are. So it’s not our gathering on a Sunday, that’s there to resource that. It’s not the building, we have that to resource it. Everything we do is there to resource that, life-on-life together on mission.

“And the biblical basis for that is you go all the way back to Genesis, you go then all the way through to Revelation, and what you find there, you find God’s purpose is to have a people for Himself. ‘A people that He reveals His glory to, and displays His glory through.’ And that is the Bible story in a nutshell. Ah, you read Eden is about that, the creation of the first man and woman is about that, ah, wha-, what God does through Noah and the call on Abraham, Israel, um, when they were sent into exile, when they were called out of exile, when Jesus comes and He gathers the disciples around Him on, on the mount to, in terms of Matthew 5:7, when He sends them out to plant churches, it’s about God having a people for Himself that He reveals His glory to, in the Gospel, and He reveals His glory through the Gospel in the life they live and the words that they speak. Um, so, so I can take you to all sorts of proof texts if you want proof texts, but it’s the most compelling argument for me biblically is the coherent biblical message from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22. Because the New Creation is the Church, that’s the story of Revelation in a glorious way. That’s the climax of what God is doing in Christ, and so the Church is far more dynamic, critical, glorious, ah, an-, an-, and sophisticated than merely a meeting, or even primarily a meeting in a particular location in a particular time. It’s God’s people living ‘life-on-life together on mission.’”

Author: “So, a follow-up to that, is there a benefit to having a particular time someone meets in a house and then from that flows everything you’re talking about?”

Steve Timmis: "Ah, in a house or a building?"

Author: "Well, you know, Sunday meetings and then you might have like a home group meeting, like you might have a small group, but then life-on-life happens throughout the week, but, is there a particular day..."

Steve Timmis: "Yes...yes there is very much a benefit for that, and um, we do it because it's a good idea to. On a Sunday morning we, because of our building, we have to run two meetings, you just can't all get into one. Um, and, um, so it's a great occasion, I love the gathering of the church. We sing God's praises, you know we pray, we rehearse the gospel, the Bible's taught, people are equipped, people are engaged with one another, um, and it's a great time.

"Would we still exist as a church if we were no longer able to do that because of persecution, and culturally, societal crackdown? We, yes, of course we could. So is it essential that kind of public gathering? No! Is it helpful? Yes! Is it helpful to get the church on a smaller scale all together around a meal, and in a home? Of course, cause that's what they were doing in the New Testament. So of course it's, and you know you, you even go back to the precursor of that in terms of Israel. Um, and that's what Israel were doing, they were living life-on-life together. That's what the Law was meant to do, that's why it was so...all 613 commands apply to the details of life, because it was about life-on-life together on mission as a light to the nations. Ah, and that, the Church has taken that, the fulfillment of that, um, ah, and lives that out in, in, in any context in which it finds itself. Um, but gathering, itself, is an essential part of being church. But not necessarily a big gathering in a building, as helpful as that is in many cultural contexts."

Author: "Alright, great. When you made the decision initially to go from kinda the program driven, attractional events model to what you're currently doing, um, what resistance if any did you face from peers or those that were within your church? Or organization?"

Steve Timmis: "Um. There's quite a bit of pushback and misunderstanding from peers. Yeah, they just thought it was a little bit, kinda crazy, ah bit kooky, a bit kinda "bees-and-sandals," you know a hangover from the 1960s, and well we'd all have deeper meaningfuls [sic] and give each other foot massages kinda thing. So there were all those kind of prejudices that were going on. And um, because it, you know, when we did it, it was within our kind of evangelicalism a bit unusual. And people were afraid of kind of heresy, you know, developing because you didn't have the kind of formal constraints, the church institutional weight of the church, ah, to kinda keep it on its track. And uh, so there was quite a bit of misunderstanding, I think, and suspicion, and ah, and, what's the other word I'm looking for? Um, a kind of patronizing indulgence. You know, "Well that's Steve isn't it. We'd expect that from him." But I think many, many of my friends expected me to go off rails, theologically.

“And in terms of the church, um, the church that I was at in my 20s, cause that’s when I really kind of developed my convictions, in my mid-20s, ah, which is like 30-, 35 years ago now. Um, between 30-35 years ago. It was, um, there was a, it just felt odd to them. And certainly in terms of that first church, I didn’t transition them well. I changed the church, I changed the structures. I changed the practices, but I didn’t transition it. So when I left, everything went back to how it was. Because people changed because they liked me, they respected me, they saw that I was, the church was growing under my leadership, people were being saved, so, they weren’t gonna argue it, but they were never persuaded. So when we took over the church that we did in the, um, a few years ago, um then, I was a lot more considerate in how I transitioned it.”

Author: “So what did you do, what were you more thoughtful about to transition it?”

Steve Timmis: “Um, well I, first of all I identified...everything’s about culture, isn’t it? It’s not about just changing programs, it’s not about changing structures, it’s about changing culture. Ah, so programs and structures are an expression of culture, and leadership is about culture creation. I hadn’t understood that in my, you know, mid-20s, ah, I did understand that by the time I was in my 40s. So I set about really changing culture, and I think there are five ways to do that. I identify this in terms of my own strategy. One is, in context, in the church context, you gotta preach it and teach it. So because I had a very clear theology of church, my ecclesiology was really quite robust. It may be wrong, but it’s robust, and well thought through and well-articulated. And so I just made sure we were preaching it and teaching it consistently. It was always kind of our metanarrative if you’d like. So that statement I made earlier about “God’s purpose has always been about having a people for Himself to display His glory to and display His glory through,” that is an encapsulation of that...that sort of melodic line runs through all of our preaching and teaching. Uh, so you just gotta do that, okay, so that’s how you change culture.

“Secondly, you pray it and sing it. And when I say pray it I don’t simply mean you pray for it, though you do that, but that you structure your prayers as a community around it so you change people’s views, your praying for, um Ethel whose lost her cat...or the cat is poor...you’re not just praying the cat gets better. You’re praying for Ethel to suffer well as she’s losing this dear cat who’s been around for 15 years so that she might commend Jesus to her neighbors and her family who don’t know Him. And that is just an integral part of how you shape your prayer meeting. For me, prayer meetings, you cannot overstate the importance of prayer meetings to cultural change. Anybody who tries to change culture without prayer is not changing culture. So you pray it, you sing it as well. One of the apparently kind of minor tweaks that we do, we take a lot of the songs we sing, we write many of our own, ah, because that articulates our theology, in the same way that “Methodism” was born in song they articulated their theology with Wesley’s 1,300 hymns. Ah, well, we try to do that, but also, just very simply, we try to change the pronouns, most of the time; so we change them from the singular, which dominates in evangelicalism, to plural. So we sing more about “we” than we do about “I” or “me”. Um, and when you get God’s people rehearsing the truths of the Gospel in song as we do, and you’re building in that sort of shared corporate identity, its vital.

“So you preach it, teach it; pray it, sing it; model, mentor it. Um, you can’t change culture unless you model it, actually do it as a leader, or as leaders. Ah,

and ah, so you live life together on mission, you don't distance yourself from it, you don't give direction to people to do it, you really do model it. And you mentor as you're doing it, you get guys alongside you, and you get them to share your life. Um, one of the disturbing features of doing church the way that we do it, a lot of people find disturbing, is the necessity of an open home. Um, a lot of leaders don't like having it open homes. They see their home as a refuge, but what they don't see is that's blasphemy because Jesus is our only refuge. And our home is what God has given us to be a blessing to others because we are to be no more than stewards of it. And I think it's essential to, as a leader, have an open home in which you really can model and mentor what it means.

"And so you preach it, teach it; pray it, sing it; model it, mentor it; and then you structure and resource it. So, you build appropriate structures, which for many people means that you downsize church with all of its programs, um, all of its ministries, you kinda strip those back. Cause of a lot of people don't have time to engage with non-Christians, because they're so busy doing church. So you gotta create space to do that so you strip back church. And then, you put your money where your mouth is. So, any kind of appointments that you can make, you make appropriate appointments so that you can change culture.

"Um, so those are four, there's a fifth one that's the most important of all, and that's repeat. You just keep doing it. Preaching, teaching; praying, singing; modeling, mentoring; resourcing, ah, structuring and resourcing. Ah, and so articulating that, having that as a framework helped me to transition a church rather than just change a church."

Author: "So when you did this at your next church, how did that work out?"

Steve Timmis: "Very well."

Author: "Is that the one you're still currently at?"

Steve Timmis: "Yeah, it work out very well."

Author: "So, how old were you when I went to that church?"

Steve Timmis: "Well, it was, what would it be, early 40s."

Author: "Okay, so you were at your first church in your 20s, how long were you there?"

Steve Timmis: "Well, I've been, I did my first church plant, or tried to do my first church plant when I was 22. But I only did church planting...because that was a long time ago, church planting wasn't the sexy thing that it is today. Um, and I only did it so that I could marry my girlfriend. And that's a story in and of itself. Which I'm sure you don't need for your research. Um, and then I went to being an assistant, and then I went, then I did a couple of years of work getting a proper job, ah, cause I was younger I never really had kind of resp-, I had a wife and a child. Then I went to become a minister for seven years. Then I started a ministry in the former Soviet Union, cause I was involved in that during the 80s, in, in the Soviet Union. And then I planted what I call our beta version of Crowded House in 1996 to 1998. And then I recruited a team to start Crowded House 1.0 in 2000. And we're at version 4.872."

Author: [Laughs out loud] "Alright."

Steve Timmis: "I wouldn't write 4.872...that was just..."

Author: "We have it recorded if we need that. Alright, um... When transitioning a church from programs to cell church, or you know, the missional communities, how should a leader make decisions about which programs to keep, which ones to cut, how quickly to complete the transition?"

Steve Timmis: "Um, I think that you...so, one of the first, no the first, no the second, but one of the first things that I wrote was, and this was for our beta version of Crowded House, ah, was *Eighteen Principles of Gospel Ministry*, and which became a book called *The Gospel Centered Church*. Um, and, and, and in that we, I try...because I did it with my colleague and friend Tim Chester, we try and address that very issue. And basically, I think that one of the problems that traditional churches have is that they don't know why they run some of the programs they do, they've just been running them. And a tradition, by definition, is that which you did yesterday, therefore you have to do it today. And you can be certain, therefore, that you'll be doing it tomorrow. Um, so, so you've got to know why a particular ministry, a particular program is running. You've gotta have people who want to do it rather than recruiting or persuading people to do it, ah, so it's gotta fit with kinda people's passions and interests. Um, so, as soon as you get to the point where you're really having to work hard to staff, and I'm talking about volunteers as much as I am paid staff, as soon as you get to that point, then you've got to ask very hard questions about the validity of keeping that ministry going, that program running. And, and I think that just those two things alone, ah, will see many churches, particularly larger churches that've got a long history, you know they've accrued programs like barnacles to a ship's hull. Um, then, um you know you're gonna see a lot, it's gonna be scraping a lot off or they're gonna fall off in the end. Um, so just ask hard questions about, you know, is this a gospel initiative, and if it is you can articulate what that is. How is it helping you reach people for Christ? How is it helping you disciple people to, to, to live a life as followers of Jesus, um, in, in tangible ways, you know ask those hard questions, get people from the outside with a blank...you just give them an open check and say, "Look, you come in and ask whatever question you want, challenge whatever," ah, and, and you're willingness to do that, to open yourself up to scrutiny, it will basically be the best indicator of your willingness to undergo the hard, to run the hard yards of, of this kind of transition. Cause it is hard for most people. And part of the problem, this doesn't need saying, I'm saying it now in case I forget to say it later. Part of the problem is that a lot of people are more concerned about church growth than they are about being faithful followers of Jesus. And so a lot of people have transitioned to a cell church model or small group model, whatever it is, missional communities, because they think they're declining and they think this is the way to grow. And I would refute that, it isn't the way to get more numbers, it's not the way to get a bigger church. If we weren't so concerned about discipleship, I'm absolutely certain we would be at least twice the size that we are now."

Author: "Hm, hm, wow. So about discipleship, specifically leadership development, how do you do that in your church?"

Steve Timmis: "Um, well, ah we developed a formal curriculum, called *Porterbrook*."

Author: "What do you call it? How do you spell it?"

Steve Timmis: "P o r t e r b r double o k. Why is it called Porterbrook you might ask? Uh, because it's the name of a river that runs just at the bottom near our church building and it's the name of a pub in the area. So that's why it's called Porterbrook. Um, and, ah that's a, that's a, quite ah, quite an extensive, ah, resource to help develop leaders. And it got out somehow, we don't know how, it's kinda used all over the world. We don't know how that happened, it's on-line. So that's available for people. Um, we invest in people, we always try and bring guys through regularly, elders, younger guys. Because I'm quite old now, like 58, I want to make sure that the predominant age of our eldership should be round about my son's age. That's what I want it to be, so. And so we bring...but we make sure...and this is the thing we've had to grapple with because we've such a large eldership for a church our size. But it's because we are actually planting churches. So we won't bring elders through unless they've a clear sense of a ministry that they're gonna run...towards church planting."

Author: "Okay, so what's the size of your church and how large is your eldership?"

Steve Timmis: "Ah, well the size of our church is round about kinda 3...320, and our eldership is currently nine with another three candidates [for] elders probably coming on in September. But we give, we give leaders away a lot. Like Tim Chester, we sent him away to a church plant about 70 miles away. And uh, we did that in September, which was a big...big thing for us because I recruited him at the start of Crowded House 1.0, so he's worked with me for 15 years. And he's a very able and godly man, so it was a big hit for us, we thought, but we've gone on without missing a beat. So we miss him relationally but we haven't missed him in terms of...which is just a real mark of God's grace. We're just about to lose another elder, so we try and give people away."

Author: "Yeah, so does each elder, do they lead a gospel team?"

Steve Timmis: "They, yeah...yeah, they lead what we call a 'City Group.' A couple of them may, but every City Group, which is a collection of 'Life Groups.' And every City Group has one or two, no I mean two, with the exception of one, they have two elders."

Author: "So how many Life Groups do you have?"

Steve Timmis: "Oh...twenty five?"

Author: "And how many people are in each of these life groups?"

Steve Timmis: "We range from like six to twelve. That's...I mean, sometimes they're more than that, but that's what we say we're aiming for. And City Groups are between three and six Life Groups."

Author: "Well here's one of the challenges we face, and this relates to the next question, is...for...when I came we had a really good women's ministry and we were trying to develop men's ministry but we found that we had women's ministry and men's ministry and all these other ministries, and then our small groups that we were trying to do...and so it's too many things going on, there were five or six different days someone could be out doing ministry, but they were not really doing ministry...you know...and so for men's and women's ministry and discipleship, how do you specifically do that in Life Groups?"

Steve Timmis: "I think we really quite...and there's a lot of people who have a similar model to church that we do that wouldn't, kinda, go down this rout, but we don't distinguish between them. We will occasionally run events for women and events for men, so like six months ago, I think, we had a night where we got all the men together and [sang] how to do good to the women in your life. The women in our lives, we not only mean our wives...if we're married, but we mean our daughters, our sisters in the Lord. So all the women that we have any kind of relationship with. And the following week we brought all the women together and how to do good to the men in your life. So, but those are kind of unusual events. We will just do once a year or something. Most of the time it all goes on in our Life Groups. And our City Groups. That's where...and we don't...we tend not to do...we tend not to draw the lines of discipleship in those terms. So, we want there to be a real sense the Life Group being an extended family, where we disciple one another."

Author: "So in your Life Groups, are they multigenerational or...?"

Steve Timmis: "Yes."

Author: "So do you have any that are just focused on men, or focused on women?"

Steve Timmis: "No."

Author: "So the City Groups, is that where you might have, you know, a couple different Life Groups that are in a particular area...and then they kinda work together? Or how does that work?"

Steve Timmis: "No, City Group is a place where you get them together for training, ah, where elders are responsible for...cause a Life Group leader is a deacon, and...and so elders are responsible for their training and oversight. And, that's what a City Group meeting would tend to be. Time for prayer, praying for each Life Group, what its doing, a resource for those Life Groups. All that's about to change when I go back April 11th."

Author: "How so?"

Steve Timmis: "It's...do you really want to know that?"

Author: "Sure."

Steve Timmis: "Okay, well we're creating ministry teams. And forming them as components of ministry streams where there's a particular focus. Um, and um, yeah, then we're creating another team where...well, a dream team that we kinda spin off ministries from."

Author: "Question 10, how do you do children's ministry in cell church? Or your particular church?"

Steve Timmis: "I think we wanna...well we ran a conference a couple of years ago called 'Both And,' ah, so that...I, I'm not one of the guys that do missional communities whose down upon attractional church. You know, I'm really not. And all church should be attractional, um, in that we should all live invitationally, any kind of activity you want to be invitational to, you want people to be drawn to it, you want to be open, so. Ah, so we talk about two front doors. So we have a front door that exists in our Life Group, or missional communities, or cell groups. And we have a front door to our gathering. And actually most of the growth comes from the gathering, to be honest, in terms of...because the front door to the world of the small group is...its...the fruit's quite high. The front door in the gathering, still even in such a post-Christian context as England, the fruit is relatively low compared to that. So, it's easier to pick. Um, so in our gathering, so we have a...we have on staff we have a family worker. Um, who is, ah, is really about equipping families to do life-on-life together on mission. But, on a Sunday morning in our gatherings we will run a children's program. Quite deliberately we will do that. And we want to equip those kids to be missionaries, so we want them to understand the bible story, we want them to contribute to their Life Groups. So we don't take them out of their Life Groups, we want them to play a key part in that Life Groups that have kids in, will be shaped by the kids as much as they are by the adults. So you can't run a Life Group that's mainly full of students or marrieds with no kids...in the same way you run one where there's lots of kids. You just can't. But we want every Life Group to see children as an integral *part*. Not a distraction or an encumbrance. And the same with youth as well. We will get the youth together, in a way of helping them be missionaries. But we won't form youth Life Groups...they will be part of other Life Groups that are multigenerational."

Author: "So having your kids be a part, are they part of the entire...like if you have...do you have a regular meeting time for each group? Each Life Group?"

Steve Timmis: "Yeah, yeah, pretty much. I mean in the sense of, there's one point in the week when we say, okay, let's get together to eat. We make sure we do that.

The kids are part of that."

Author: "And so it's for eating, is there anything more than eating?"

Steve Timmis: "Yeah, we'll pray together, we'll talk about the Bible...the, ah, the preach [sic] on the Sunday together. And kids are part of that."

Author: "And are there particular questions that go with that time? Is it more structured? Less structured?"

Steve Timmis: "No, no, no...we're a family, getting together, intentionally to eat, sit down and celebrate the Lord's Supper together, pray together, laugh together... drink coffee together. Or tea, tea most of the time...we're English."

Author: "So during those times, when you have your Life Group meetings do you invite people to come, or is that primarily designed...?"

Steve Timmis: "Yeah. Yeah, everything we do we'll invite people."

Author: "Everything is open?"

Steve Timmis: "Everything. There is no closed door meetings, even church member meetings are open meetings for us."

Author: "Do you see that there might be some type of advantage to having a combination of kinda what you're describing and a hybrid of also having some programs? For example we have a Sunday morning gathering and children's ministry that meets in another room for a portion of the service. But we also have our Home Communities, is what we call them, and then we have AWANA and Youth Group that meet on Wednesday night. So do you see an advantage to something like that? Or do you think that creates business?"

Steve Timmis: "No, I mean, I think those are judgment calls that each local church has to make. I just think you've got to, you gotta have the right metrics to measure them by, in terms of how...how is it helping you do what you want to be, what you want to be as a church. And, and don't just run a program because, like, that's what churches do. And, and you've got to...okay, what's the best way...if you take the young people, what's the best way that we can equip these? Well certainly one, I would say, would be for them to be integrated in a Life Group where if they're teenagers they're hanging out with guys in their 20s. I mean that's just relationally a very important influence on them. Um, and for young

kids to have lots of auntie's and uncle's and grandma's and grandpa's...that's just gonna be really healthy for them. We've seen that, you know, with our kids. Ah, we've seen that all the way through. And I think in principle it's gotta be. Cause the whole thing theologically, the family, if we talk about mom, dad, kids, whatever... the nuclear family or extended family...the physical family does not exist...isn't prior. Then you take the church and say...and God says, 'I know, it's a bit like a family, you know where we'll call brothers and sisters,' that, in terms of God's purposes, the physical family was created to be a world's example of what church should be. Cause that physical family is not gonna last beyond the grave, whereas church is, it lasts into the new creation. So the Church is prior to it all. It's the primary community. So, so that's why having it multigenerational is so important. But you then take a judgment call, okay, because a...you know, because we've got loads of kids, I mean a ridiculous number of children in our church. You know I wanted to preach a sermon a while ago saying, 'We are neither Catholics nor rabbits, basically, just stop breeding.' And, and it, but we've got them coming through from being like nine, ten, eleven into their teenage years and just socially that's a difficult time, isn't it? I mean, it's...biologically it's difficult, but socially it is, and even more so now with all the pressures in terms of sexuality and gender. And so you've got to ask the hard question, how can we do that? And you can't take a principle approach, 'Hey, we don't do any youth work.' If that's the best way that can take kids who've already formed a close relationship to kind of engage with them well, and to help them be missionaries to their friends, then that's what you do. But you do it in a way that's connected with the Life Group that they're part of. So that...that it's an expression of their Life Group. But, you're taking kids from a number of Life Groups, small groups, Home Communities, whatever you call them, but that's a judgment call you make in the moment. That ever church is free to make that. And I'm not gonna say, you know, you don't to...because that would just be doctrinaire and silly and kind of gives the biblical preference to what I do and...and I'm not justified in doing that."

Author: "Well let me ask, so one of the things we are trying to figure out, so right now it's based on location for our groups, but we're trying to figure out if we should have it based on ministry. So for example if there's a group of people that might want to get together and they're serving AWANA, um, which is a children's ministry; or a group of people that wanna get together and serve MOPs, which is Mothers Of Preschoolers, which is reaching out to, um, women, um, who are, you know, mothers of preschoolers that their husbands maybe don't go to church and many of these women are unchurched...so, do we do it based on location, do we do it based on, um, the ministry and people having the particular desire to focus on a particular group? So that's kinda our crossroads that we're facing right now, what advice would you give in situation like that?"

Steve Timmis: "I would say you don't make it a crossroads. Don't make an either or, you make a judgement call in terms of missional opportunity. Um, so you might very well make a lot of sense to say, okay, you got a, I don't know what you call them round here, but kinda 'moms and tots,' here you gotta, you got um kids, youth, well let's... and this is what we're doing, we've got...they're all ministry teams. And they're part of a ministry stream to families. Um, and that has kind of a bit of a geographical location to some extent, but not exclusively. But, we're saying 'Okay we've...you know...we've got people here, the "moms and tots" stage and

we can look to see the 18 years of experience of exposure to the gospel. So that's why we're doing it this way.' But that doesn't, because everybody lives in a particular location, then you've got the opportunity to bless that, that, that particular location of that ministry street or neighborhood. Because you've got, you just have a few people living there. And it may be that you've got so...like we've got...so many people in a particular part of the city, a project housing where we've moved people to over the years for the sake of the gospel. And that, that's where, you know that's where there is a particular ministry but it's location. But within that location they'll start doing their particular ministry focus ...work. So, it's, there's just a glorious flexibility to it. My, you know, my critiques of any particular model of church is that you, you, you somehow try to baptize that and say this is God's model, and, and it *isn't*. I mean none of our models are God's model. Um, and it, you say...okay I just want to see people...a pastor of a mega church, I want him to be grappling with the question with his leadership team, how're we gonna make the most of Jesus in this community? How we going to exploit the place we have in our neighborhood? And to do that? And is God going to be honored with that? Of course He is. Is He gonna judge him, that leadership team because they, you know, maybe haven't been quite as radical as we've been in ministry? I don't think so at all."

Author: "Well I appreciate your time very much and I'm gonna end the recording. And then give these guys the opportunity to ask questions if you have time for that."

APPEDIX C

INTERVIEW WITH DAN BRAGA

Author: "This is Ryan Faust, Doctor of Ministry Student, at Gordon-Conwell Seminary.

I'm interviewing Dan Braga, pastor at Taproot Church. Dan, he has signed the Informed Consent Document, and, this is being recorded, do you agree to be interviewed and have this be recorded?"

Dan Braga: "I do."

Author: "Okay. Great, so, what's your name, how about full spelling of name and current ministry?"

Dan Braga: "Dan Braga, B R A G A. And I serve as the Lead Pastor at Taproot Church here in Burien [WA]."

Author: "Alright, what's your experience with the program and events driven type model ministry?"

Dan Braga: "Ah, I was seven years as a youth pastor in a fairly large Calvary Chapel, which was ministerially, methodologically, and philosophically completely centered around the Sunday gathering, preaching of the text, and events as a means of evangelism. So, I've a number of years in that model and supporting that model, being a part of that model."

Author: "What is your passion and motivation for leading your current ministry?"

Dan Braga: "I believe that the Church is the inbreaking of God's Kingdom in the world, it's the hope of what humanity will be when the King returns, and we are the *bear-ers* of good news, the gospel of Jesus; that Christ is risen from the dead, the hope of humanity is in the name of Christ, in Christ alone."

Author: "What is the biblical basis for the ministry method you're using?"

Dan Braga: "Um, I don't wanna sound trite, but I think the Pauline Corpus, the New Testament in general, but particularly Paul's framing of his churches and the

Book of Acts, Luke's account, historically the narrative lends itself to the way that we're framing up our ministries...framing up our churches, our church plants."

Author: "Okay, is there a particular passage in Acts or anywhere else in the New Testament?"

Dan Braga: "No, but there's broad ideas, so, if you follow the trajectory of Acts, what you see Paul doing is planting in cultural hubs, first going to like a level one circle of influence being Jews in the Synagogue and then moving out, branching out after rejection to a level two, which would be gentiles, a further distance between cultures, but, and then multiplying those under trained elders. And then returning to those churches to, Luke uses a specific word *sterizo*, to strengthen those churches, to establish them, ah, theologically under these elders. And Paul did that over and over and over, you're hard pressed not to take that pattern and just steady on with it."

Author: "When you made your decision to change your method of ministry from the program, events driven...to being a cell ministry or church plants, missional communities, gospel groups or whatever you wanna call -em, what resistance if any did you face from peers or those in your church or organization?"

Dan Braga: "It's interesting because, I had envisioned and planned and prayed to plant a church from scratch and I ended up re-planting a church, and this little church I inherited...they brought me on unanimously saying basically do whatever you wanna do. And they were, in essence, a very dysfunctional missional community [laughs]. There was about thirty of them and the relational ties were about thirty years old. Vary ingrown, very co-dependent. And I think the pressure that I faced was when we began to add new people, and those relational dynamics changed, to where this co-dependent, insular, kinda inward focused community of people that had been together for three decades was now being broken up by other relationships. That was surprising to them, though they wanted that, that's what they wanted...um...though the decision we had to make to bring about growth...really upset people. And it was primarily, I would say, my leadership style that I faced the most pressure on. I wasn't very diplomatic in the early days, and I wasn't very democratic, and I don't want to say that I was authoritarian or autocratic, but they brought me on to lead and make change and I was making changes, and, um, it was an emotional train wreck. I told -em it was like being in a funeral parlor watching the death of a church and being in a labor room watching the birth of a church at the exact same time, if you can imagine the emotional intensity of that for about three and a half years. [laughs]"

Author: "So, you have told me in the past, you came into this church, it was growing, you were talking about the building being like an idol, wanting to move the building to the city center because the building was out in the woods, right? So you were wanting to move to the city center of Burien to be closer to the people you were

trying to reach, what was it like going through that process? And what was your motivation for wanting to sell it [the building]?”

Dan Braga: “Oh, the process was terrible and the most sanctifying thing I’ve ever been through in my life. Ah, I’ll do the motivation first. This little insular, ingrown community of people based their whole life and ministry success on the fact that they had this little building that they had bought and paid for, um, and now just lived in, and dying in, that’s what they were doing. So my motivation was to literally break them out of their self-made coffin. That building was a coffin. And my second motivation was we, like Paul, wanted to be right in the center of where this little small bit of culture was being made. Burien has its own culture and its coming out of where all these pubs and restaurants and condos are coming in, we wanted to be right in the center of all of that to influence it and shape it and be part of it. The process is what literally almost broke our church in 2012, when we finally sold the property there was a massive, uh, I don’t even know how to describe it, bomb that went off. We lost over a third of our people who I thought were with us...”

Author: “What was your size during that time?”

Dan Braga: “One hundred and twenty people. Maybe. I’d say we lost thirty to forty, the budget tanked, and then we went through a whole year of dealing with accusations and questions and walking through repenting of mistakes that we had made as leaders, and also recognizing where we hadn’t made mistakes and standing our ground, and, oh it was *very* difficult, *very* difficult. But I will say this, on the record to anybody who re-plants a church, those are the fork-in-the-road decisions that if you make them, you’ll survive, and you’ll come through the other side and begin to be who you wanna be. If you don’t, you’ll stay in that coffin. And I’ve watched guys do it.”

Author: “So would you say that’s the biggest reason why people don’t wanna, necessarily, sell their building or go to this particular model because they’re afraid they’re gonna lose everything?”

Dan Braga: “Western Christianity worships the idol of security and comfort. Because we’re affluent and we don’t understand risk; we don’t understand eternal values. And I had to rip off that, that band-aid with that building down there, and at this point it’s still been difficult, but God has used it.

“And...yeah...we live under the false idea that we are secure. And people associate that with financial stability and ‘building’ stability in the church, and there’s, of course, there’s truth in that, but not to the degree that Christians should carry it to. We’re to be an unstable needy people, and if we’re not needy, if we’re stable, ah, that’s our death, that’s not Christianity.”

Author: “So as a leader, I guess that you already kinda answered this, but anything more that you want to add, so as a leader, how did you navigate these waters and

keep your church organization from sinking? What mistakes did you make? What did you do well?"

Dan Braga: "Um, well, to be frank I thought the church was dead in 2012, I didn't think we were gonna make it through. So my, my first answer to how did we navigate it was, I didn't think we would. And so I just kept putting one foot in front of the other, after 2012 all the way to 2013. And it was one conversation after another conversation after another meeting after another meeting, letting people leave, letting people ask questions. And we had to let it all finally shake out, and those that stayed, they stayed because they trusted us. And they wanted to go. And those that left, didn't trust us. They didn't wanna follow the vision that we were presenting. And we had to just buckle down and say, 'If this is God's, and this is really what He wants, then we'll survive this. It's not gonna be pretty, it might take a long time, but we'll survive.' If it's not, I had to relinquish control and say, 'Okay, we made a mistake. This little church died and now I gotta find out what God wants next.'

"What mistakes did we make? The, I would say the main mistake that we made, and I would hope this doesn't sound arrogant, when the particular group, the particular two or three individuals that spearheaded the division, when they really started showing their teeth, I did not courageously call that out publically the way I should have. And it caused more devastation. We should have been more bold in our simply stating these...these people are acting divisively and slanderously rather than humbly obeying scripture. I was a young leader and I hadn't faced that much intense pressure, I was in my early thirties dealing with men that were in their sixties that had been pastors for thirty years were the reason that the church had died, but boy, it was a very difficult thing, a scary thing to have to publically call out people like that that had so much power, and so much respect, and I didn't do it. And, uh, that didn't help us, and to this day there are still unresolved questions for people because we didn't make a public statement. And I've resolved never to do it again, when divisiveness like that that's so clear rises up, be biblical about it, mark people as divisive and trust God with the rest.

"When you ask what we did well? Um, we did stand our ground. We prayed and we made the decision that this is the direction we're going, 'We love you, we want you to go this direction, we're not trying to control you, we believe the Bible's compelling us to this.' And so, we didn't stop moving forward. And today that's bearing out fruit. Today, we're beginning to enjoy some of that fruitfulness."

Author: "So, 'Standing your ground,' are you saying specifically...selling the building, going to the city center, and then developing missional home community groups?"

Dan Braga: "All of that. And more. All of that and more. Defeating the...standing the ground saying, 'Look, the relationships that you think are healthy, they're not healthy, as far as the New Testament is concerned,' which was very offensive to many people, but they needed to hear these things. If they don't hear these things, and have somebody that will stand and lovingly say these things, or in my

case sometimes not lovingly because I was young and made mistakes...um... they'll die there. And I think we as pastors have the responsibility to lead them out."

Author: "When you say, 'pastors have the responsibility of leading them out,' do you think that sometimes it might feel like there's the pressure of, 'We pay your salary, so why should you lead us out from this? You should do what we want you to do.'"

Dan Braga: "Yeah."

Author: "Even though it's not stated, it's just kind of a pressure that you feel."

Dan Braga: "That's the dynamic between church planters and pastors, uh, and the difference between Paul and his elders. And we don't have a lot historically of how the elders were paid in the first three centuries, so we don't really know, at least I don't have that information at hand. I think that a pastor who wants to lead an initiative like moving a church from events-centered to missional community-centered has to have a semblance of entrepreneurialship and catalytic leadership. I think there are guys that are called to tend to a flock until the flock dies, which is a noble calling. And then I think there are guys that are called to transcend and transform flocks. And I think each has their respective role within the body of Christ, and so...I have friends that are committed to being bi-vocational for the very thing that you just said, they won't be, they won't be tugged on by the financial strings. And then I have other friends that are like, 'Yeah they are, and I wanna respect that they are paying my salary and I wanna take my time with them, and I wanna lead them.' It's the, pull the band-aid off fast, pull it off slow thing. Usually guys that are bi-vocational are, 'Rip it off and let's move forward.' Guys that are salaried are a little more diplomatic, a little more, you know, even in my own situation I wasn't paid by the church that I replanted for the first eighteen months, I raised all my own support. I hadn't even really thought through that, it hadn't even entered my mind that...I was just obeying what God had called me to. And I think, Ryan, too it's important on the salary thing, the pastor is not a 'business man,' he's a called individual, and he has to first determine with a salary or not a salary how God is calling him to lead and shepherd. That's the first question. And then the salary can be filtered through that. I think it's a backwards thing to say, 'I'm gonna make my decisions based on my salary or not my salary. I'm gonna make my decisions based on prayer, the Spirit, scripture, and then the salary will add in underneath that rubric. That seems a more biblical, way.'"

Author: "Let me go back to an earlier question, so you were talking about you know the events-program driven church not really necessarily being healthy or being able to make disciples or being biblical, so expand on that."

Dan Braga: “I guess what I see in...if the church is based wholly on events, what that produces is an entrenched immaturity in the Christian community. When Paul talks about us being a body, and the nose and the ear and the eye and the hand having to do its job, in an event driven situation, only the mouthpiece and a few hands do the job, and everyone else comes and sits and listens. And there’s salvation there, there’s some beginnings of health, but maturing disciples are taking on responsibility in their own Christianity, in their own growth, and in an event-driven situation where your whole discipleship is to go, sit, listen, and watch, you’re never doing anything. And that’s the difference we see between the New Testament and what I think is biblical discipleship, and the mega-church, event thing that happens now in the west.”

Author: “So what would you say, then, is the model in contrast?”

Dan Braga: “I think it’s a both/and, I would never want to disparage the Sunday event. We do that, we philosophically say Sundays are for, um, the preaching of God’s word, corporate communion, and the celebration of the resurrection and song on the first day of the week. Ah, but we also dually emphasize that you’re not really a member of Taproot Church, in fact you can’t even be a covenant member of Taproot Church unless you’re involved in a Home Gathering, serving in some capacity at that Home Gathering, and at the Sunday gatherings. Um, I don’t want to disparage doing some sort of event to draw people in, but it’s a bullet point, it’s not the point of the Church, it’s a bullet point of the Church. So you have to dually emphasize the relational nature of the church for it to be healthy, especially in the liberal Western context where we live.”

Author: “So you’re saying Sunday morning is not the event, it’s a bullet point of the Church?”

Dan Braga: “Yeah, it’s one part of being in the Taproot culture.”

Author: “Same thing with, say, missional home community? Is there a third or fourth element?”

Dan Braga: “I would say at Taproot, God over the last couple years has really begun to make clear that we, ah, leadership development. We believe that every Christian is a leader at some capacity, and so whether you’re leading an HG, we have systems now that are continuing to get better and better at intentionally training leaders to multiply Sunday gathering, home gathering discipleship. So that’s our church planting tracks, and our elder development tracks through gospel leadership, two year residencies, two year internships, and multiple layers of theological training... so I would say three components would be: Sunday gather, home gathering, and leadership development, that then results in church planting, doing it again, multiplying.”

Author: “So I heard you say HG, so is it, did it switch from missional communities to home groups?”

Dan Braga: “Yeah, we made that decision theologically. I very curious what you all think about this? We did that a ye...year ago? Over a year ago now...and we were hard pressed as we read Paul to find him praying for evangelists and mission in the New Testament community, we saw him constantly praying that they would know the love of God and love each other. Ephesians 1, Ephesians 3, 1 Thessalonians chapter 3, ‘increase our love for one another.’ Second Thessalonians chapter 1, we don’t see Paul praying, ‘God give them power for mission.’ And Pastor Darin and I, and Jim, we had lengthy conversations about Missional Community, and if it was creating a legalistic pressure to tick off a box within our communities, versus a gospel motivation to go out and be the people of God in a community. So we said, ‘We gather on Sundays to hear the gospel, and we gather in homes to live the gospel, and mission flows out of that.’ So we...”

Author: “Okay, so wait, what’d you say, ‘We go to church to...”

Dan Braga: “...hear the gospel. And we would say, ‘Go be with the church to [the] Sunday gathering [sic] to hear the gospel, be fed the gospel.’ And our HGs, our Home Gatherings, you gather in homes to live and be the gospel, to each other and to your community in community. We’re increasingly persuaded that mission flows out of that. Mission isn’t what you lead with, mission flows out of *that*. Which I realize is backwards in the Missional Community conversation. Um, so I’m happy to have that picked apart and refined as time goes on, [laugh] and tested.”

Author: “We’ll talk. We’ll talk. That’s good. Alright, so next question here, number seven. When transitioning church from programs to cell, how should a ministry leader make decisions about what programs to keep, which ones to cut, and how quickly to make the transition?”

Dan Braga: “Wow, that is a hard question to answer. Obviously, if you have a program, I think you first have to have a very distinct set of metrics that you use to look at programs. So what are your standards of success? You have to define what they are. Is it conversions? Is it a measurable ability, you can measure how a disciple was maturing. So in other words you have a men’s study group, and you have guys that come in at year one, in January they’re not reading their Bible at all, but by the end of the year they’ve read through their Bible for that entire year, they’re having studies now, they’re growing in Bible discipleship. That would be a metric by which you would gage, ‘Do I keep this program for its purpose?’ So, I think the question is so broad, because there’s so many different goals for each different program. I’ll just talk about Taproot. We believe that the primary means of discipleship are the scriptures in community. We believe discipleship happens at that organic, relational level. And that’s why home gatherings are emphasized as absolutely, non-negotiable, necessary for health. When we have men’s ministry, we do, we say, ‘This is a vitamin that supplements the meal of HG and Sunday gatherings.’ Okay, so men’s ministry is something where our goal is to get men together to play baseball, go camping, um, have men’s Bible studies

occasionally if they want to, but that's always a supplement. It's a vitamin to the core meal of the Sunday gathering and the Home Gathering.

"Our youth ministry, I fought having a youth ministry forever, and now I'm facing the reality of 75 elementary [age] kids that are gonna be in Junior High and High School soon, so what do you do with that? The reality is, I want my kids to be met where they are, and, um, our youth pastor is very committed to our model of ministry, so we've been talking a lot about how our students are to be serving in the Sunday gathering, as greeters, as set-up and tear-down people, volunteering in Taproot kids. And they are constantly taught that, 'We're not a separate church, like this isn't the youth group, we're Taproot Church and this is part of our discipleship and *being* with the church, and *being* the church to *students*.' But, all that's language stuff, that's very broad, I realize that's very broad. I think missional community has to be broad. [laugh] I really do.

"On the how quickly to complete transitioning stuff; you got guys all across the map, I'm a pull the band-aide off fast kinda guy just by wiring and personality, I can't sit in something for too long if I'm not comfortable with it, ah, it just, I'm just not wired to do it. I have a friend, he and I had these conversations, he's a Presbyterian guy, and he said flat out, 'I'm not making a decision for at least ten years.' Actually, I had lunch with John Piper when I first started doing this and was able to ask John Piper, 'Hey John, when did you make your first big decisions to make changes at Bethlehem Baptist?' He said, 'I waited ten years before I made one big decision.' Interesting isn't it. But I also have friends who came in and within 18 months had done like I had done. Everything was changed, vision, mission, names, music, everything. It was roll it up, throw it in the garbage and start over. And that has its good, and it's got its bad, it's got its ugly and it's got its beautiful too. So, I think its contingent on wiring."

Author: "So let me ask a different question, so if you've got too many things going on, so you've got programs and missional community, do you see that there's any competition between them?"

Dan Braga: "Absolutely, you can't...if you think of a church as having a certain, um, a certain size plate of capacities to focus on things, and you really want to be a missional community or, or a cell church, you know a missionally driven, small group driven church, if you have events that are taking time, we have to be honest with Western culture, Monday nights, Tuesday nights, Wednesday nights... people are gonna opt for what they think is most important to them. And if your church is teaching you that you've got this program that program, that event this event, *oh* and missional community, but there's no emphasis on that missional community as primary...Western Christians will not opt for that. It's not, it's not structured enough, it doesn't have enough 1, 2, 3 steps to the best you, now idea. It's too loose. And we have had, this last couple that left our church, they literally said, 'You need to give us 1, 2, 3 steps to discipleship.' And we said, 'You're doing it right now. This is how we do it, we do it in relationship, things like this are discipleship.' And they just couldn't handle it. And so they wanted a program driven church where you go to your program, your program does this and it produces this. That's great, and it's very tempting to bow to that. That's very tempting to want to do that. I just don't think it produces mature Christians."

Author: "Alright, so number eight, how do you do leader development for your HG church? Cell group church?"

Dan Braga: "We use apprentice language. So you have a, somebody who's been leading, they have one or two other leaders that they've been praying through and just are very intentional, 'I'd like you to come alongside and consider multiplying this group.' And it's usually between anywhere from six months to eighteen months of co-leading with an established leader. We have a pastor that oversees all of our home gatherings, Darin Brill, he does monthly coaching calls with all of our HG leaders, so there's direct pastoral oversight. Darin's vision for HGs is really beautiful, and I've really yielded to his lead on that, completely. Um, and so we're letting it develop that way, that's how we trained for guys that want to go into further leadership.

"You know we have our Gospel Residency stuff, our gospel leadership training material, which is a two year process, which takes you from theology of kingdom and culture all the way through mission, character development, its, I'm pr...I'm prayerful that its robust enough to really get the job done that we're hoping that it gets done."

Author: "Gospel residency, that's Acts 29 correct? It's like a pilot model [of leader development]?"

Dan Braga: "Yeeaaaah, I don't where all that stuff is right now. So, that's all up in the air again. Classic Acts 29, 'Yes, we're gonna do this!' And then six months later, 'Oh, no we're not doing that.'"

Author: "So, you're basically continuing it on even though it's not necessarily happening [through Acts 29]?"

Dan Braga: "Yep, at the local level we've just taken all those ideas, and done our own thing now, and we're serving other churches by inviting them in."

Author: "When do you meet?"

Dan Braga: "Ah, our gospel residency they meet every...we have two, this year we have thirty students, um and they met Monday mornings from 6-8:00am and then they had a Tuesday night group that met from 6-8. They just finished their first year and they're taking a break, and they'll pick back up in October with me. I pick up year two with our gospel students now. Those are the guys that want to go into deaconship, eldership, and church planting. And so I walk with them for a year. Um, we're big about training groups, not just a guy. So we wanna train teams to plant, not just a guy."

Author: "So you're doing year two, but who does year one?"

Dan Braga: “Uh, the first...I have five guys, we had eight in our first two year program, and five of those guys now are leading these classes. So, it worked. I raised up leaders, and now those leaders are leading. And I just [am so joyful there].”

Author: [Speaking at the same time] “So it took about two years?”

Dan Braga: “No, it took about five to get where we are now. But the actual program, year, two years.”

Author: “Because I was with you when you started it more or less. That was like three years ago.”

Dan Bragga: “That was still getting roughed in. So you were at the very beginning of all that, so now we’ve refined all that and this next two year group is about thirty students with my guys, that you were with, leading that, and then I pick up... they’ll pick up next year, and then I’ll pick up year two students that want to go on further. And they walk with me for that next year. I like it. It’s rough, but we can develop on this platform. And we’re developing strong leaders that get the gospel, they get church planting, and they think of the church differently than someone coming in on a Sunday morning saying, ‘What are you gonna give to me.’ They’re thinking like Paul’s teams would have thought. And, boy has it taken a long time to get here but I’m, I’m thankful.”

Author: “So when you say ‘developing teams’ you’re talking about church planters that you tend to send out? Or are you talking about people in teams within your church?”

Dan Braga: “Both. Both, in fact we just recently introduced the idea of, because I’m a church re-planter, we propose to any of our students and couples if they would consider going into one of the little dead churches here in Burien, and I’m in contact with all the Transform Burien pastors, go in as a catalytic couple to help that pastor break through some of the strongholds that they’re facing. We want to send our people into local Burien churches to strengthen the Church, and um, it’s pretty exciting because we’ve had a number of our students say, ‘Hey, I would commit to a year with this church, and see if we can break some ground out with the pastors where they’ve got blind spots or where they’re not seeing why they’re insular, or whatever.’ Just to be a help, just to come and serve as a missionary in that. This is Paul’s idea, Paul, Paul, Paul in the Book of Acts, and Luke, again, uses this very specific word ‘stodizo’ he wanted to strengthen the churches. And I’ve become persuaded that revival and mission will continue and happen if we strengthen already dead churches, and plant new churches. It’s not either/or, it’s both/and.”

Author: “So it’s like what, Acts 13, 14? Galatia?”

Dan Braga: "Yes."

Author: "Se he went through one time, and went back a second time to strengthen them."

Dan Braga: "That's exactly right. And our idea is send Christians into these little dead churches that are weak to strengthen them. We'll see, it's messy, and it's in like...it's a fetus right now, it could be, it could be very cool."

Author: "Cool man. So how do you do women's or men's ministry, and discipleship in an HG model church?"

Dan Braga: "Well, uh, like I said, we do have a women's ministry and a deacon over women. We have a men's ministry and a deacon over men. And both of those deacons are wholesale committed to home gatherings. So they'll actually say, 'Hey, we're gonna do this men's ministry event,' we limit it to about once a quarter."

Author: "So events once a quarter?"

Dan Braga: "Yeeahh, it's kind of a loose...if they have an idea of something they wanna do, but they're very clear with the ladies that come, 'Hey, this is just to build some relationships, but where the heart of our church is in a home gathering and you need to be in a home gathering.' So, we use events as a portal or and invitation to the home gathering and Sunday gathering. I think the guys this summer are playing baseball, so, just fun stuff like that to build the foundation of relationships that's without any real agenda in place."

Author: "So how do you do children's ministry in the HG church?"

Dan Braga: "Oh, it's a mess. So, I'll use my home gathering as an example. We have on some nights, uhhh, almost 15 kids that are all under 6. Something like that. Which is just total insanity. So we actually, our group is modeled around...um... one Tuesday night we have men's night, which is just the men get together and talk about issues that we're dealing with as men. The next Tuesday night is ladies night, and the men watch the kids so that the ladies can really minister to one another and serve one another. Then we do a family night, which is this coming Tuesday. And usually one of the adults will put in a rotation, will watch all the kids, put them in a basement, or outside now that it's summer time and watch the kids so that there can be deep conversation. And then our next family night that we do the following week, is just a free-for-all. There's no agenda, the kids are in there with us, we're just talking about whatever comes up, talking about baseball or talking about the Bible, it doesn't really matter. Um, and we've found that that honors, um, what we wanna produce in discipleship while also respecting the fact that it's hard to have those deep conversations when your two year old is, you know, flipping out at your heals constantly. So you just navigate it that way."

Author: "The 'free-for-all' is that just like a hangout night?"

Dan Braga: "Big meal, order pizzas. Yep. And the idea there is pray, and let the conversations go where they will."

Author: "Yeah, yeah. Do you do any type of children's ministry on Sundays?"

Dan Braga: "We do. We have, uh, grades at this point one through fourth, we're working on getting our fifth and sixth grade going, and we also have the very fledgling beginnings of a Junior High and High School ministry, but that won't be on Sundays, we do, we do offer children's ministry for parents."

Author: "Alright, you said one through fourth and then what was the other one?"

Dan Braga: "We're praying on getting our fifth through sixth grade going on Sundays."

Author: "And do you have a Junior High and High school ministry on Sundays or no?"

Dan Braga: "No. We encourage, in fact, all the kids sit together on Sundays as a group. They consider themselves part of our church and they come in and sit together so they can listen to the sermon and be *with* the church, their church together. We really push that. So that we don't create...and Ian's really go this, he gets it, and his heart is, I think I may just add that in this recording, for a missional community church to get footing, you've gotta have a number of leaders that get it, and they wanna go for it as intentionally and firmly as you do. If you don't, you'll constantly be undercut, and frustrated."

Author: "So how do you do youth ministry in your church?"

Dan Braga: "We, right now we have what would look like, for all purposes, the traditional start of a youth group, they meet on Thursday nights. It's Junior High and High school at this point with a youth team. But, our youth deacon, and that team are constantly saying, 'Be involved in an HG with your parents. That's where your life is.' And we encourage the parents to walk that way as well. Now what's interesting is, we're pretty tied in with the Young Life crew around here, and so we have a lot of kids that are, their parents aren't believers, and I don't know how we're gonna handle that yet? Other than we want them at the Sunday gathering and their gonna hear, 'Be a part of a, be a part of an HG.' So maybe what we would do is invite them to come be a part of Ian's home gathering or Alexis's home gathering, the youth team's home gatherings, because all the youth team is in a home gathering somewhere during the week. Just yoke up with them and come be part of it. I don't know, I haven't thought that through yet."

Author: "So for children's / youth ministry, is there any advantage to doing some type of hybrid between, you know cell group, missional home community type ministry, and some type of program?"

Dan Braga: "That's what we're going for, but ours is at the very beginning, development stages, we are going for that hybrid. So, once a month event, big event, like this summer they're gonna take once a month and go do fun stuff with the intent, the intention is that he has a leadership team around him of two other couples and two other singles and each of those should be leading small DNA style groups within that youth group that are gender sensitive and..."

Author: "So we're not just talking, you know, youth ministry here, we're talking children's ministry, so like all the way through, programs and what you're trying to do with HG, I mean, don't you think that might create conflict with too much going on?"

Dan Braga: "Yes."

Author: "So what do you do?"

Dan Braga: "You pick and choose your battles. And when you find that there's been mission suck or vision drain, you have to cut something."

Author: "So mission suck or vision drain?"

Dan Braga: "Yeah. And we at this point, to not do, like, Sunday children's ministry in a traditional sense would be defeating the vision and mission of our Sunday gathering, to the degree that we can't do that. The youth ministry thing remains to be seen. We're figuring that out as we go. And the biggest challenge is getting parents to understand you're not sending your kid to youth group, you are helping train a disciple who you should be walking alongside in that ministry. That's the biggest challenge."

Author: "Cool man. Thanks Dan, I really appreciate it. I appreciate you. Is there anything you want to add in conclusion?"

Dan Braga: "Uh, no just, we gotta be thinking about what the church is gonna look like in the next fifty years. Think deeply about that. [laughs]"

Author: "Totally...alright, here ends the recording."

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW WITH JOEL COMISKEY

Author: [start at 10:49] “First, do I have your permission to be recording this?”

Joel Comiskey: “No doubt about that, yeah in fact I’ll be recording it. And I’ll send you a YouTube, a non, unlisted YouTube so nobody else can see it except those who you give the link to. So that’s what I like about zoom, it’s easy to record. So anyway, go ahead.”

Author: “Okay, so um, maybe just say your name, ministry, and the title that you have.”

Joel Comiskey: “Yeah, I would say Joel Comiskey, and the Joel Comiskey Group, and coach, author.”

Author: “Okay. Um, what is the experience that you have had with the program model and events driven type church?”

Joel Comiskey: “Um, I think I was raised in it, like most people, you know that was my upbringing...Bible College...uh, Seminary, and even as a missionary in Ecuador that was my understanding until...But God had a kind of a river underneath a bubbling brook you might say of cell ministry that eventually exploded into my present ministry.”

Author: “Okay, good. What is your passion and motivation for leading your current ministry?”

Joel Comiskey: “I think just to make disciples who make disciples through cell ministry and church planting... Because I believe that making disciples is really the essence of cell ministry, it’s what Jesus did when He sent forth His disciples in a group. So I would say, Ryan, that my passion lies with two books *Biblical Foundations For Cell Groups* and *Making Disciples To Make Disciples*. Have you read those books?”

Author: “No, I haven’t.”

Joel Comiskey: “Yeah, those would be the two that I kinda feel are really where I’m at as far as what cell groups all about.”

Author: "Okay, great. What's the biblical basis for your ministry method that you're doing?"

Joel Comiskey: "Yeah, just, just what, what I just shared. The book *Biblical Foundations For Cell Based Ministry* is my attempt to say, 'Is this cell church thing biblical? And, and then the second half of that book is called *Making Disciples in the 21st Century*. It's the second book, cause I believe if I could choose one biblical truth is the most important it would be making disciples. And that's what I believe is the philosophy behind cell ministry, is making disciples."

Author: "Okay, good. Is there a particular Scripture you'd point to? You mentioned the Great Commission but is there another Scripture beyond that?"

Joel Comiskey: "No, I think it's the Great Commission, because, you know if you'll notice Jesus sent His group out, and that's kind of what I've realized...I, I pinpoint in my book is that we in the West take that as individual discipleship, so I'm gonna grab one person, or go off and have my devotions. But Jesus said, 'make disciples' to His group, and they knew what He was talking about. He had been with them as a group for 3 years, and He sent them in homes, so, really discipleship according to Jesus was to go into the homes, and to multiply those, and so small group ministry was the way, I believe, Jesus made disciples even in Luke 9 and 10. In Matthew 10 we see that He sent them two by two into the homes and said 'stay there.' So I really do feel like making disciples is the essence."

Author: "Okay, great. So when you made the decision to go in the direction of cell ministry, um, what resistance, if any, did you see from your peers?"

Joel Comiskey: "Um, yeah, well...I was at the time in Ecuador when things really started taking off for me. And, we had kind of a program based ministry of doing, ah, evangelistic conferences for a week and then we had discipleship for a week, but it was all based on, on Sunday. Cell ministry really closed the back door at...in, in the mother church. When we planted a church and we decided to go with ... cell ministry, um, I think among this kinda program based ministry called 'encounter' there was resistance, there was resistance like, 'Oh, you're doing... you know, maybe you think our ministry is better.' Um, even, even when we tried to transition the mother church there was certain ones with agendas that didn't want to focus on the cells. And we really failed in our first transition, we didn't really prepare for that transition, so, I remember I still have a taste in my mouth about a failed transition in the mother church. When we planted a new church it was easier, but I know what it's like to fail in a transition as well."

Author: "So why do you think that you failed in that first transition?"

Joel Comiskey: "I think I failed in the first transition by going about it too quickly, by, um, announcing we were gonna become a cell church, the pastoral team kinda announced. And the board was very powerful, there was a couple board members that had like a city-wide counseling ministry based in our church, and they basically said, 'No way are you gonna emphasize cells as the main thing.'

And we had not really even transitioned the pastoral team, I was the driving force behind the cell ministry. And the lead pastor was on board, the, the, the Ecuadorian guy, but, but not all the pastoral team had even transitioned. I was trying to get them involved, so we went about it way too quickly, we did not transition the pastoral team, and then we sort of announced it, we could have, we could have tried to win that guy with the counseling ministry, we could have tried to show him that it would benefit counseling, we should have waited longer, we kind of announced it, and we got, basically, you know we got blown out of the saddle as it were. And yet small group ministry was still critical, I mean we grew to like 50 cells, the cells closed the back door, we grew from 500 to 900 in more of a program based church, but, ultimately because cells did not become the base, they withered away after we planted a new church.”

Author: “Okay, huh, so how’d you navigate those waters then? Emotionally and spiritually?”

Joel Comiskey: “Well actually I think that these, these powerful people on the board, you might say...it, they, they sent out the lead Ecuadorian pastor to plant this new church and I went with him, in a way they got rid of the problem, by planting a new church, and yet the team that planted the new church were more cell based, and we started the new church plant as more of a cell based team. The mother church kinda continued with their program ways, and the small groups withered away.”

Author: “Huh, interesting.”

Joel Comiskey: “Yeah, so they kinda got rid of their problem by kinda sending out the lead pastor. It was more of a lay driven...in fact then they hired a guy that was more conducive to their program based ways. And, and so forth, so, yeah, it was, it was kinda tough, that, that one, but the new daughter church became more of a cell based, cell driven, and that became sort of a model of cell church to the rest of Quito to influence many, many more people, um, from that mother church, from that daughter church.”

Author: “Okay. So when transitioning church from programs to cell, how should a ministry leader make decisions about what programs to keep, which ones to cut, and how quickly to complete the transition?”

Joel Comiskey: “Well they say it takes about five years, in, you know, North America to make a full transition. So, you know I would say don’t cut any programs until the cells have replaced the need for those programs. Like, for example when you have enough cells, in your church, you know, you’re not going to suddenly need a visitation program if your cells are visiting. You’re not going to suddenly need an evangelism program because your cells are evangelizing. Um, but I would say don’t cut any programs until the cells could truly fulfill the reason for those programs. Um, and, and you gotta give yourself time, again if you’re gonna look at a five year transition, which normally the experts say it takes about five years, you wanna cut very slowly. So for example let’s say a children’s ministry that you

have, you know you don't...you might want to give it a timeline, like okay, in two years we would like to see enough Intergenerational [multigenerational] Cells that we would not need to make AWANA the main thing in our church, you know, or whatever. But you give yourself enough time, and you wanna project out there, or maybe you can say we're not gonna host AWANA in our church, you know we're gonna give it to another church, because there will always be parents that might want to send their kids to a program like that but we're gonna become more involved in intergenerational cells. That could be but you're gonna wanna set a time frame. In so many years we're gonna do that."

Author: "Yeah, and I'll get to the children's ministry a little but later, that's kinda gonna be the end. Um, let me ask, ah, how do you as the leader develop leaders for cell group church?"

Joel Comiskey: "Um, develop leaders for cell group church, well all cell churches are basically based around four things: cell, celebration, equipping and coaching. So there's really only four things, their very simply. I would say prayer and missions are the essence of every cell church, so you could say that's the fifth thing, but in a sense that's the air of the cell church, but, when you look at equipping you're preparing new leaders and equipping. Every cell leader, future cell leader needs to go through equipping, it might last four months, it might last six months, it might last a year, but its an equipping track. I cover that in my book *Leadership Explosion*, but all cell churches have an equipping track. I call it discipleship equipping, and so every cell leader would go through that in order to lead a, to be a team member of a cell group."

Author: "Okay, so, doing the equipping is it classes or is it a particular book study that you do where you have, maybe, a leader and a co-leader and you're going through this book together?"

Joel Comiskey: "I, I, I say this, I say, 'One equipping...decide what you are equipping... uh, one equipping and many ways to teach the equipping.' So one equipping, but many ways to teach the equipping, so you have your equipping for your church, but then you say, 'Okay we're gonna teach this equipping as Sunday school. Those who can't get there on Sunday school, could maybe do it a half hour before the cell starts, or half hour after the cell starts.' Uh, you might do the equipping even on a, a two day retreat. Again, one equipping, many ways to teach the equipping.

"You could do it one-on-one for a while, but then, say, the first part of the equipping could be one-on-one, but then we'll go into a classroom situation. Um, but again, don't get too legalistic on the way to do it, it's more that everyone gets through it. I mean in my equipping I even have it on audio, but then you wanna meet with a mentor and say, 'Hey, how you doing there? How's it, how...what did you think about that?'"

Author: "Okay, so what's the curriculum that you use?"

Joel Comiskey: "My equipping, um, is, is this one here. It's, it's basically...*Live* is eight weeks, um, and then, then I have *Encounter* eight weeks and then *Grow* eight weeks, and then *Share* eight weeks, and then *Lead* is eight weeks too, and this is, this is basically if your leading a cell group. So you could finish mine in 9 months, but if you do it in a retreat setting, you can definitely reduce it down, um, and so on and so forth, yah, so that's my equipping. I, I tell people you can start with somebody else's equipping, but then your goal is to make your own equipping. So that it becomes part of who you are as a church, and obviously you save a lot of money, but, but basically take somebody else's and, but then determine your own. And that's what I did, I kept on recommending different people's equipplings [sic], but you kn'w I said, "I need to develop my own to figure out what I believe, so that's what I just showed you, but eventually you want to get your own equipping."

Author: "I've actually, um, led two classes on *Live* and one class on *Encounter*. Um, and one of our Home Communities is currently using *Share*. So, um, but we haven't necessarily done it systematically for all our leaders in all of our groups, so, I'm trying to figure out what leadership development to do this next fall. Um, and actually I think that those books, and so on, are good and not just for leaders, but especially *Live*, that's baseline foundation I think for anybody when they first become a believer. And I even think long time believers, that that's a good refresher. So..."

Joel Comiskey: "Good point! My, my only, um, challenge would be to be careful to use that...to be careful to use that as a cell lesson. Just because you some people will be farther along than others, and they'll feel like oh, wait, I'm not up to date, especially if you've got new Christians in. I try to distinguish between the equipping, what I just showed you, and the cell lesson, which is usually based on the pastor's sermon. But anyway, anyway..."

Author: "So let me ask you about that, because when I first came here, uh, everything we did for Home Community was based off the sermon. And, so that was probably the first four or five years. And then, um, we began to realize a couple years ago that there were some groups that just didn't wanna do it. Um, they didn't like the questions, or for whatever reason they just felt like it was a rehashing of the sermon and they didn't feel like it was effective. This was during the time when I really didn't know much about cell, but, uh, a couple years ago we wound up doing one of Francis Chan's books [*Multiply*]. Um, and then this last year I kinda opened it up to different things people wanted to do, which was one reason someone's using the *Share* book. Um, but this fall we're gonna get back into Ephesians, so everybody's doing the same thing in the fall, but I'm not sure what to do come January. Do we continue doing it based off the sermon? What's the advantage to doing it based off the sermon for Home Community versus uh, you know, doing some other type of curriculum maybe during home group time?"

Joel Comiskey: "Well number one I think you want to grant liberty to your people, but that's the, that's the place of your supervision...is that, you know your supervisor can discuss with the leaders and find out what they're doing, um, but I would say for the most part, if it's possible following the pastor's sermon is much better because, you know...it's like you know as well as I do, Ryan, that people hear

what's going on on Sunday, but they're not really applying it often times, and you know, if you can know that they're gonna be wrestling with some of those concepts in their own lives during their home groups, that really makes a difference in their lives. And, come on, it's only once a week, you know you're preaching a message, they have a chance to apply it, you're going on to another message. Now, my feeling though, Ryan, is that you can always give them some variety, so, let's just say in four weeks you stop and say, "You know we're gonna do Francis Chan," that's good, there's nothing wrong with that, you know we've done, you know marriage things, and that's fine, but get back into your sermon. I have grown to appreciate the pastor's sermon to be honest with you, I think it's great. Now the key is to have that lesson in their hands before you preach, so the leaders can be looking at what you're saying, 'Okay I wanna do this, I don't want to do that; I like this question, I don't like that question.' So, the key is before you preach, it's in their hands, they're looking at it, they're saying, 'You know, it's almost like a running commentary when you're preaching' and they're actually looking at that and say, "Okay, what am I gonna do with that in my life group the next week?"

Author: "Yeah, I think the mistake I probably made was the first four years I would send my exegesis to all my leaders and I would say, you know, "You guys come up with questions, send them back to me, I'm gonna try to use the best of the best, so we're working together. But only one or two guys would send me questions, and then I'd put the questions together for Sunday and I'd put them in the bulletin so everybody in the entire church would have a copy of that, um, but then I think there were too many different questions. Um, and it was kind of a hodgepodge going too many different directions and there wasn't necessarily guidance. So, um, yeah I wonder how, maybe, do you have a sample of good questions related to sermons? I'd love to see something like that."

Joel Comiskey: "I could, I could send you something. I could, I could send you something, Ryan, certainly, and in my book *How To Lead A Great Cell Group*, um, do you have that book?"

Author: "Uh, show it to me again, I might have it. I probably have a dozen of your books but I haven't read -em all."

Joel Comiskey: "Yeah, no no problem there. Yeah, this one, *How To Lead A Great Cell Group*, uh, it, it actually has, there's one chapter on how to write good questions. And I usually say for every two observation questions an application question. You know you wanna have about six questions, maybe, maybe sev-, six to eight questions or five to eight questions maximum. But, you know going from observation into application, and, but I could send you some, I could send you a couple possibilities, yes."

Author: "Alright that'd be great. I have this book, it looks similar." [Laugh out loud]

Joel Comiskey: "Yeah, yeah that's right. So this book, um, would be more; that book is how to coach, this book is how to lead one. So you don't have this one?"

Author: "I don't have that one. But, and I haven't read this one yet."

Joel Comiskey: "Yeah, this is my best selling book right here, and its written at the level of a cell group. And the book you just showed me was [copied] after this one but hasn't sold as well. Yeah."

Author: "So the one *How To Lead A Great Cell Group Meeting*, is that for anyone leading a group?"

Joel Comiskey: "Yeah, that's for anyone leading a group, it's very easy to read, um, I think you'll really like it."

Author: "Alright, good deal. So how do you do men's or women's ministry and discipleship in cell group church? And let me explain the context of where my question is coming from. So when I first came here, you know we have all these ministries like Celebrate Recovery, um, MOPs, you know, which is Mothers of Preschoolers, um, Grief Share, and then we didn't have a men's or women's ministry that was necessarily very good, and so we were trying to develop it. So my wife took the lead in the women's ministry and she did an outstanding job developing something in the first three years that just really took off. And so we kinda came to a crossroads, and it was either we go the direction of Home Communities and all of our men get involved in trying to lead Home Communities, or we develop a men's ministry that, you know, is on par with what the women are trying to accomplish. And, so um, this really kinda became the crossroads for one of our elders. You know, he said he didn't wanna do cell ministry and Home Communities because he wanted something like what the women were doing for the men. But then he realized if we did that, you know, he'd be out three or four nights a week and never see his family. And so, he came to the conclusion, well, 'Why don't we double down on Home Communities and then make this the best that it can be.' Well our women's ministry has kinda dwindled since then, uh, and so I'm just wondering how can you do men's and women's ministry and discipleship within the cell group ministry model?"

Joel Comiskey: "Well, no that's a great question. I think that you can definitely do women and men's ministry in the cell model. It's just that good old definition of cell, congregation, and celebration. So the cell is the base of the church. Your celebration's on Sunday. But the congregation is just the meeting of those networks. So let's say you have men's homes [sic] groups, but those men, the men's home group will plant a network, a congregation activity where you could have men's ministry things. You know they go out and mow lawns, they have a men's night, but it's the men's cell coming together. Women's cell coming together...you know it's almost like the youth ministry, you know you have the youth congregation, but hopefully you can eventually get in youth cells. I mean,

you know, but the bottom line is it's more of a congregational thing, and I really do believe women's cells, men's cells are very apropos, many are doing it...uh, does that answer your question a little bit?"

Author: "Somewhat, I think what we're trying to do is make all of our home groups multigenerational and men and women, you know and so even going in the direction of children, you know, instead of just a women's group and a men's group. The only way, or the only type of group that is focused is the high school ministry which we're just beginning. So we're gonna have two high school cell groups in the fall. But, um, other than that we're trying to have it be multigenerational."

Joel Comiskey: "Okay, okay...I see what you're saying, okay now I understand that. And by the way I love multi-intergenerational, I love that, that's a great place to start because you can more easily get the children involved. So, if your question there then would be... um, yeah I would say double down on the home groups. And you always, the men can always do ministry together. Um, by the way, one way to do that in the intergenerational groups is to, during the prayer time have the men divide in another room with the men, and the women with the women so you're getting a little bit more of the men, women, even intergenerational group during the witness time, you know if you're doing the four W's, you know the witness time would be key. You know the men could pray together so you're getting some of that. And then you can have the men's retreat occasionally. But again I think you're right on, do not overburden them with time restraints. I would, there's nothing wrong with the occasional men's breakfast as long as the men know that, the, the, to be in the cell is the priority, um, I, I would say that. That's what I would say. Now, now let me ask you a question: if in fact you have intergenerational cells, let's just say one man is divorced and wanted to start a men's cell, or something like that, would you not want him or her, him to do that?"

Author: "Well I think the struggle, there, has to do with unity between our coaches and between our elders. So I think the conclusion that we have come to, trying to be unified, trying have them all very similar, so we really want it to be based on location and we really want it to be multigenerational. So um, and not just men, not just women, so, that being the case we have some restrictions, which would hinder doing something like that."

Joel Comiskey: "Now, now my, and I love your philosophy, and I love that, you're right on, I would just...in my opinion the idea is start with the definition. You know your definition is critical, this whole cell thing is based on the definition of a cell, that means where you have, what's the word, similarity. You're similarity is based on definition. Now my definition is 3-15 that meets weekly outside the church building for the purpose of evangelism, community, and spiritual growth, with the goal of making disciples who make disciples that results in multiplication. So that definition is very clear, it's very holistic, it's very...right? Yeah. If you have that definition, your bread and butter's gonna be intergenerational. If you have a few exceptions that are following that definition, I don't think that should be a problem, it might be in your church if you decide that's okay. If you're elders say, 'No, we really don't want any exceptions.' That's fine, you know, so, you would just have a certain homogeneity, but for me homogeneity can flow

naturally if they're all holistic, you can have some exceptions, you know, to the rule if they're all the same definition."

Author: "Yeah, so I would say, um, you know I think that when we have too many restrictions, I think it kind of hinders, um, people feeling like they're free to do what they wanna do, and it kinda squelches some of the passion. At least that's what I've observed in the last couple years. And so we're all trying to do the same thing, but, you know, the passion isn't always necessarily there. So this is one of the things I'm trying to help coach us through and navigate us through, um, where people feel like they have ownership of what they're trying to accomplish. If that makes sense."

Joel Comiskey: "It does, and that's why, you know...so what I think that, eventually as you go on your transition you will need to allow for some exceptions. I have to allow for some exceptions, um and yet the, no, no, I would say no exceptions if they're not following the solid definition cause you, you...that's what happens in North America, you become so creative that pretty soon those small groups don't mean anything, right? They, they become everything and anything and then there's no holism, that's why I love when you're talking about Soma, you know there's a holisticness there. Keep the holistic, but then allow for some creativity based on your definition."

Author: "So, you know, Soma [church in Tacoma], kinda being what I've tried to model this after, um, back in 2010 they were, um, really trying to do it based on location being multigenerational. And then they realized they had spent years, kinda going against the grain by trying to force that to happen. So it was probably 2013 that they decided to switch it around, and just allow for any groups to get together, any way that they want to put it together. So if it's gonna be everyone the same age, or all women or all men, or they're driving across town because they have a common interest, because what they were trying to do, probably about three years ago is, um, have it be something that works more naturally with people's kinda passions and abilities and relationships they would naturally form, so, they were saying based on location they discovered, uh, that it made it hard to get people to work together that didn't necessarily know each other or like each other. And so, um, I kinda see that we're, we are facing something similar. Um, so we are going in a direction, um, but it's kinda like you really have to inspire people to continue to go down the path that we're going."

Joel Comiskey: "Yeah, and you're going down a good path. Geography is a good thing, a lot of these major cell churches are geographical based, connecting church, you know, big on geography, I don't know...but the bottom line is that the definition is critical. Stay with the def-, in my opinion your unity is based on the definition of the cell. Then you allow liberty of different homogeneity as long as they keep the definition. I think you can organize according to geography, for example you could still do homogeneity based on geography. You know the single's cell in the north of Seattle. That's still under that coach. You have a, a women's cell in the south of Seattle, that's under a coach. So, you could still have geography as far as coaching, but have homogeneity, in fact we used to have a big map out of the city, and we would mark where those cells were based on color, so we kinda had your cake and eat it too. We had homogeneity, but you could see where those cells were, and, and you know and they were

geographical, geographically based and homogeneous. So, I would just say don't worry about those things too much."

Author: "Okay, good deal. So how do you do children's ministry in a cell group church?"

Joel Comiskey: "Well, it's a tough thing, no doubt it, and, you know, you've read my book *Children in Cell Ministry* right?"

Author: "Yes."

Joel Comiskey: "So, so I think you're pioneering, you know I think that, that you guys are really good on intergenerational cells. Start slow, you're gonna be the key in promoting this. You know, anybody that's willing to do the children's cell, you know, just give them the power pill. Rejoice in them, highlight them, give them the resources, hopefully [it will] spread a little bit, and I think your gonna find over the years if you stick with it, Ryan, that some of these children are gonna catch it when they become youth and they're gonna get into youth cells and, you gotta give it time. Partly it's gonna be if you're gonna stay in the church long enough, if your gonna really promote this, you know put some money down so that they have material, your gonna have to give some coaching there, but I'll tell you there's a lot pushing against it including you know just the program based AWANA. Which is not bad, by the way I love that, there's nothing wrong with that, obviously, my children do AWANA, but, but some AWANA people feel like why would I need children's cells, right? Why would I even want to do that? So, so that's where the rubber meets the road."

Author: "Okay. So I guess in our church what we're trying to figure out is, um, currently we have AWANA on Wednesday nights and we have youth group on Wednesdays nights. And so in this last year for youth group the change that we made is, uh, we're trying to make youth group primarily Jr. High. And then, uh, the high school groups, they're small groups and they meet on Sunday night. And so, that started in December and that has been great. You know the kids actually, the high schoolers, they love these small groups more than, uh, the youth group. And so, um, a majority of our students, we probably only have a dozen high schoolers, but probably have about 30 Jr. highers. And so, and we have a tone of kids, uh, that are elementary school age, so in other words the Jr. high and high school youth group is gonna blow up in size within the next two or three years. So, um, we're thinking that we wanna have, you know, Jr. high youth group on Wednesday, and then what about AWANA, do we wanna continue to have AWANA on Wednesday because that's kinda the lifeblood, somewhat of our church, in that there's a lot of people that have come to our church when we re-established AWANA five years ago. See because there were two years where we did not have AWANA before I came, and then when I came we decided to re-establish it. And so our church grew from about, probably, 210 to about 260 within a year, by re-establishing AWANA. Um, but I would also say AWANA somewhat becomes a choice for people because they decide, do I want to become a part of a home group or do I wanna take my kids to AWANA. Because some people feel like they can't do both. And so that's kinda the struggle that we're facing, so our questions is do we double down on Sunday morning and what we do for children's ministry and then get rid of AWANA? Or

do we keep AWANA, um, in which case we really don't have children involved in Home Communities very much? But if we double down on Sunday morning and get rid of AWANA, then we would also include children in our home groups and make them intergenerational groups, kinda like you wrote about in your book in chapter 5 in *Children in Cell Ministry*. So, that's kind of our crossroads, what do you think about all that?"

Joel Comiskey: "Yeah, I would say that you really want to, um...whatever you do you need to think in terms of transition. So I would say you wanna give yourself time, I would say a year or two years. You wanna talk with your key people and say, 'Hey, would you be willing to make the transition with us? We would like to see your children that are now in AWANA in a home cell group, would you be willing to do that and help us in the process? We are really gonna put a lot of money into Sunday service, and then also in children's cells. Would you be willing...you know, we're not gonna start, we're not gonna do anything abruptly. Right now AWANA will continue, but in a year we would like to see this transition take place.' So everything is in transitional terms, cause you don't wanna lose, cause you wanna keep that 260 up there, right? And yet I think they'll be really benefitted if you can give them alternatives, 'Intergenerational cells, we're gonna care for your children, they're gonna get the same thing they'd get in AWANA, but they'll get it in home groups, in fact its gonna save time for you. And it's gonna benefit our church long term. Cause your children are gonna understand cell ministry.' So think about transition, pray with your elders, you're gonna need your elders behind this, you're gonna need to drink lots of coffee with people. You know, one-on-one, and, and just make sure people are sold on it. You know, kinda doubly sure, cause people can even nod their heads, and then later resist, so, yeah. So hey, I need to get going, but this has been great."

Author: "Yeah, I really appreciate it."

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW WITH JEFF VANDERSTELT

Author: "Hi, this is Ryan Faust, and I'm interviewing Jeff Vanderstelt, pastor of Doxa, which is in the Seattle area, and the date today is July 13th, 2016. So Jeff, if you could state your name, current ministry, and title in that ministry, maybe spell that out for me."

Jeff Vanderstelt: "Okay, Jeff Vanderstelt, V a n d e r s t e l t, I'm the Lead Teaching Pastor at Doxa Church in Bellevue Washington."

Author: "Okay, what's your experience with program and events driven model of church?"

Jeff Vanderstelt: "Um, you mean in terms of like what I have I done?"

Author: "Yes."

Jeff Vanderstelt: "So not my gradation of what I think of it but more like what is my, my experience?"

Author: "Right."

Jeff Vanderstelt: "Yeah so I was in, I, uh, was a Christian in a Christian Reformed Church for six years, started up a ministry out of pretty much nothing, built the whole thing, and that had...was jr. high and high school, oh, probable two gatherings a week in larger groups with students in each age group. Um, went from there to a pretty large church in Chicago Illinois, called Christ Community Church, where I stepped in after a guy who had been involved sexually with students, went to prison for it, it was highly programmed. Um, they kinda followed the Willow Creek model where they were...Sunday was more for non-believing kids and Wednesday was more for believing kids type of thing. And then I ended up getting called to step into Willow Creek, and led the student ministry at Willow Creek. Uh, decentralized it from all on campus to part on campus, part off campus. Uh, and then...since then I've been planting...I planted a church and helped plant many, many churches and recently stepped into what was, so 18 months ago, what was Mars Hill. Um, the live campus where Mark Driscoll preached in Bellevue, and um have been, um, now transitioning that for the last 18 months towards missional communities."

Author: "What's your passion and motivation for leading your current ministry?"

Jeff Vanderstelt: "Well, uh, primarily the love of the Father...that I know I've been dearly loved by God through the sending of the Son, um, and so that's my main motivation is His love for me. Um, my passion is to see Christ glorified in the Puget Sound, saturated with the gospel. Um, my overall heart and desire for the Puget Sound is that we might have a day where gospel saturation occurs to where every man, woman, child has a daily encounter with Jesus in word and deed. And that's what, that's what motivates me, and I believe the church is supposed to do that together in the everyday stuff of life, not just primarily on the Sunday event or on a Wednesday or small group. So really equipping and mobilizing the church to be God's people so that Habakkuk 2:14 vision of, 'The knowledge of the glory of the LORD covering the earth as the waters of the sea' might actually occur, so, that, that's what motiva-, motivated by the love, passion for the glory of Christ, and a heart to see the Puget Sound saturated. And not just the Puget Sound, I feel very called to all of North America as well, for the same reason, so."

Author: "So what's the biblical basis for the ministry method that you're using?"

Jeff Vanderstelt: "Uh, I would say its grounded in the identity that we have in our baptism, so that we have...when we're baptized in the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit there's a...biblically any time God gives a new name it has to do with their new purpose, their new way of living. And I'm convinced that the baptism that we've been given, the baptism identity we've been given shapes up what the church is supposed to be like. And so when you think of baptized in the name of the Father, it's supposed to love like a family because it is one, you love like family, not be a business, um, though we need to follow of course, submit, I think, to the governing authorities for all those things in terms of why we do 501(c)3 status and all that. So, we're supposed to be a family, Jesu-...we're baptized in the Son, Jesus is our King, which means we're meant to be servants in the Kingdom of God in this, in the midst of this world, so they can see and taste what it looks like to actually be a part of the Kingdom of God. So I think that's the identity of the church, is to be servants of the Most High King, extending the Kingdom into all of life, and then, um, baptized in the name of the Holy Spirit, which means we've been given new birth by the Spirit, uh, we've been given the ability to know the Father's love of the Spirit and call Him Abba Father. We now know Jesus because of the Spirit to call Him our King, and submit to Him therefore, and then the Spirit empowers us to be God's missionary people. And so I see every single believer as a missionary sent by God, Spirit into every single moment of our everyday life. So that's for us, then the church is a family of servant missionaries sent to make disciples who make disciples, and therefore everything we do should embody that belief. Um, so I'm not trying to first of all ask, what works best, what's the best pragmatic approach to accomplishing some vision, I'm asking first of all, who are we because of who God is? What He's done in Christ? Therefore we get our identity. So every single activity in our church, we back it up into a theology of what we believe in 'who is God,' as expressed in Christology 'what He's done,' in particular in Jesus, uh, leading to our ideology of our identity, which is 'who we are,' which I think is where we should be doing more of our ecclesiological work, and that leads to 'what do we do?' ...our missiology expression of who we are in the world in unique ways. So that's what shapes up everything we do as a church, at Doxa, and at all the churches that I have planted or overseen in some way."

Author: "So when you made the decision to change from, uh, you know the traditional style of ministry, program driven, to what you're currently doing, what resistance if any did you see from your peers, within the church within the organization?"

Jeff Vanderstelt: "Well first of all I would probably clarify...and I'm starting to use different language where I'm not using...I'm not trying to go, like, 'I'm anti-program' type of thing. I, I'd now define program...if program's defined by how we organize our people, people and resources, then I'm not anti-program. Uh, but I am anti-the program being the attraction. So I think that's, that would be the push back I would say, it's ultimately not the program that should attract people but Jesus and His people, um, and therefore I have no problem organizing God's people to be together to let Jesus be seen, cause He's the attraction. So I think the pushback for me, just to clarify languages, um, I'm, I'm not for...I'm, I'm...I've stepped away from attractional ministry that sees the event as the attraction, instead of Jesus formed in His people in all of life as the attraction. So that would be the distinction. And what led me to step away from that is that I, I had been leading student ministry at Willow and when we decentralized and equipped our students to be in ministry in all of life, we saw them grow up in Christ more, we saw them lead their friends to Christ, we saw ministry happening all over the place, and yet I would get regular calls from parents that, that had no clue how to talk to John and his friend about Jesus, or engage in the neighbors about Jesus, or, and here they are at what people would think is one of the best churches in the country at that stage. And yet the majority of the people didn't know how to make disciples. And so I realized that, that programmatic approach to church was actually developing a, an, an anemic Christian, a Christian who had very little ability to walk out the commands of Jesus, in particular, especially around making disciples who make disciples. So I, I was convinced we've gotta actually take seriously what the mission of the church is, which is Jesus being glorified in all things through disciples, formed in Christ's likeness, who also make disciples of others. So that, that's what led me to step away from that approach, to ask, actually ask, 'If I did it in student ministry, why isn't it happening in adults?' Uh, seems like it should. So that's when we started churches differently to see adults in the same way.

"In terms of people's reaction...I mean I got all kinds of push-back for probably the first ten years of doing it, I would say at least the first five years I was the butt of the joke in a lot of cases. And even made fun of publically sometimes in the organization I was a part of, you know even at Acts 29, oftentimes we were kinda the red-headed step-child of the organization from my observation. Um, I think that's changed, I'm not a part of Acts 29 anymore, but I think the perspective of what we're doing is not, is no longer looked at in so much a kinda goofy, that's silly, nobody does that, that'll never work kinda terms. I think it's changed, more and more. In fact I, the reason why is the majority of the churches that got planted in Acts 29 were very ineffective at making disciples, and the only ones that seemed to grow were the ones that had such dynamic communicators that the majority of the network that didn't have that were saying, 'Well wait a minute, if I can't preach and everyone will show up what do I have to do?' I think pragmatically they said, 'This isn't working, I need to wrestle with why.' Which led to a lot of open door conversations, sometimes behind closed

doors, cause they didn't want to admit, sometimes publically that, that they weren't doing well, or that they needed help, and, in fact, I found that the majority weren't very effective at making disciples in their context."

Author: "Okay, so at your current church have you had to navigate these waters of any type of transition from what they had with Driscoll to what you're currently trying to do?"

Jeff Vanderstelt: "Well there's a few things that I really had in my favor stepping into this situation: one, the devastation was so obvious and so painful that I think people were ready for something different, um. And there were some things they weren't ready to be different, which I'm thankful for which is they still wanted the Word of God to be upheld, I mean in fact I'd say what was going for me was an openness to a new leadership style, but they all loved the Word of God, um, so the beauty of that is if you can just make a case biblically about who we're called to be as God's people, and people actually uphold God's Word, then, then you can lead -em there. The hardest people, in my observation, are people who don't have a very high view of God's Word. Uh, because, when you open up the word and bring them to it they just reject it. But they already had such a very strong commitment to the Word of God that that was in my favor. They love Jesus being proclaimed, and so I'm always looking at the Gospels [as] the primary motivation for why we do everything we do. So that, that went, was really good for me. And then, I think because Mark beat the drum about reaching the lost so much, mission was in the DNA of the church in terms of they wanted mission, but the people didn't necessarily know how to personally be on mission. That was the lack, and so when I stepped in and said I want to equip you to be the disciples who make disciples, not just you be the ones who invite them to me, to hear me speak, uh, there was an open reception but a kind of an ignorance, 'We don't know what that looks like. We have no idea what that would mean.' Then as I started to lay it out, and I started using language like, 'You don't go to church, you are the church,' 'Church is not a Sunday event but a 24-7 people,' uh, when I would say that kind of stuff they would, eventually the feedback, they would say, 'This is overwhelming because you're saying all of our life...is... basically meant to be ministry and mission.' And I would have to correct that and say, 'Well, I didn't make that up, that was already true before you knew it. Before I said it.' Like, 'That's always been the case, you were bought with a price, Jesus' very life given for you, and you are not your own, therefore everything is His. All of your life was meant to be for His glory and His purpose.'

"So of course when I say that, they'd go, 'Yeah, we're overwhelmed with it because it used to be Sunday for an hour and a half was church and Wednesday for an hour and a half was small group, or community group and that was it. The rest of life was us, and we could do whatever we wanted.' And I said, 'Well the beauty is, well God was at work in you, and through your life even when you weren't aware of it, even when you weren't intentionally engaging it. So the beauty is He was doing it even when you didn't embrace it, now if you embrace it, think of how much more aware of the work of God going on in your life all the time, like this shouldn't feel like a bigger burden, this should feel like you just got empowered to step into the life He's already given you and doing work through you, not just inviting Him to join...to give you the power and the awareness to join

Him in doing His work.’ So that’s what I’ve been doing is helping people realize, this isn’t new, uh, and what I’m saying isn’t new, it’s as old as Jesus and His ministry, uh, and even older than that, it’s as old as the creation narrative, um, back in the Genesis account. But that was, I think, take them to the Word, help them realize the Spirit of God is already at work in them. I’m reformed, so I’m, I believe God isn’t dependent on us, but He invites us into the work, um, and so He precedes us, He goes behind us, He goes all around us, and so because I can speak that into a reformed community and say, ‘Isn’t it amazing, God’s gonna do the work despite you but you get to join Him in it. Would you rather join Him in the work than miss out on it?’ So, so all that was in my favor, I’d say, stepping in. Um, I, the harder part to be honest was for, I think the people who left, very very hurt, and went and started other churches out of their pain, or didn’t land in a church and kinda floated around for a while, or did land in another church that was not all together that different. Um, in a lot of ways I think those are the harder people probably to lead, uh, than the ones who stayed and said, ‘No, we’re here because we’re committed to the church and we’re committed to the Word, we’re committed to Jesus, we’re committed to mission.’ And so, it’s been a great, great, great journey to be honest. I’ve had a ball.”

Author: “Good, yeah, awesome. Well, when transitioning a church from programs to cell, or missional communities, how should a leader make decisions about what programs to keep, which ones to cut, which ones to quickly transition?”

Jeff Vanderstelt: “Yeah I think for me, the decision for what do you keep, what goes, what needs to be added, that type of thing, that’s kinda the language I use, um, how will this serve the end goal of developing disciples who make disciples? Like that, everything has to run through that filter. And how can we simplify so that we’re not so diversified that we’re not doing anything? So many churches keep adding programs and they added them probably in a state of their existence when it made sense. And then they passed beyond that state, but they kept the program. Uh, they we’re willing to let go of the extra baggage, or luggage that they were carrying. And so, I’m always asking is this effective for making disciples? Is this one too many things that we’re providing so we can’t do it well? Uh, because I think churches do too much and therefore I think they do almost everything poorly. Um, what are the bare necessities we have to have? Like I gotta figure that out, so what the bare necessities are. We’ve gotta do those and do them well, whatever that may be. Um, and then if there’s extra room, extra, kinda like if there’s extra budget, if I’ve got room in my financial budget then I can add to it, but most churches don’t have enough in their time and resource budget, staffing and whatever else, to even do what they’re doing presently very well. Uh, so I’m asking the question: 1) does it fit the filter to make disciples well? 2) are we simplified enough so people know, these are the absolutes you must be a part of to help you become a disciple that makes disciples? And 3) do we have the resource ability to even do those well?

“So for instance when I came on I said, ‘We got, we got basically three basic programs around here: we’ve got our large group gathering, because...I’m not gonna get...’ and that’s another thing, we process through if you wanna take body terms, you can’t get rid of body organs that keep the body working. So in this church it was Sunday, that’s the heart that pumps everything through the

whole system, uh, what I stepped into, so we're keeping Sunday, it's not inherently evil to do a big gathering, I don't see anything wrong with that unless it's sucking all the resources away from actually making disciples who make disciples. For us it mobilizes it, that's where I can speak vision, it's where I can equip, it's where we can experience the best equipping happening, um, in one place, I mean I don't think it's the most effective equipping tool, but I think it's presently what I had as the best equipping mechanism. So I wasn't gonna get rid of that. Um, but, I did have some ladies go, come to me and go, 'Hey, you know, we used to have this thing for women and we'd love to do that again.' And I said, 'Well, we have basically three programs here, we have, we call them "gather, go, and grow," those are our three. So "gather" is we "gather" on Sunday, um, and maybe one off gatherings for special events when we need them, a women's equipping day, a men's equipping day, those kinds of things. Um, but it's always toward equipping, it's gotta exhort and encourage the body towards the mission of making disciples. That's got-, if it doesn't do that, then we're not doing it. Then 'go' is the Missional Community, there's, you're with a group of people who love one another like family, you serve like Jesus served us, and share the gospel as missionaries both to each other and to unbelievers. And the third one was 'grow,' get into accountability with a few guys, we call them DNA groups, or a few ladies. That's, so when the ladies wanted to do this thing, I said, 'Well, is it, does it fit gather, go, grow? Those are the three things you've got. Um, I don't have a problem with you getting together as ladies, obviously, but do you feel like you have enough energy to be a part of the gathering, be in a missional community making disciples, get together with a few ladies and be accountable to each other other's development, and add more to that? Um, if so, go ahead. Or, maybe you should think through those three categories and say, "How can we do women's ministry in those three places? In those three ways?"' So they had to wrestle through that and I had to help them, and they started some things that were great within the context of those three focuses, which allows my staff to focus on three things really well instead of tons and tons of stuff. And so even student ministry has to fit those three things. They've gotta be thinking, 'Okay, how are we gonna equip students for ministry, how are we gonna get them together on mission in a missional community, and how do we make sure they've got some mentor accountability for their own growth in their lives?' So those three things, just, I run everything through that. So, usually we don't do programs if it doesn't fit into one of those...well we never do programs if it doesn't fit that, so."

Author: "So my assumption is you have Sunday mornings, you have missional home community type groups, and then you have DNA groups: is there anything more than that?"

Jeff Vanderstelt: "That's it...well then we do one off events, so we'll do like training for any of those things. So it might be, 'Hey let's get together and train missional community leaders' or 'Let's train people to know how to walk through DNA together for accountability,' let's give them that kind of training. So if it supports those three then we do it. Um, and, if it, if it robs from those then we don't."

Author: "So do you have an adult Sunday school?"

Jeff Vanderstelt: "No. But we have training on Sunday mornings. So, like we would take...I told all of my staff, all of my volunteers, 'Anytime you wanna take the Sunday morning gathering time, since there's a great, you know, since your kids are being taken care of in another part of the building, if you wanna use that for training, if you wanted to use that for counseling, whatever you wanna use that for, great, feel free to, but we're not running a bunch of programs in addition to that. Like if you wanna take it and use it feel free, I'm fine if you don't even hear me preach, that's okay because we're all about equipping disciples to make disciples, if this helps you do that, then you don't need my preaching, go to this.' So we let them use Sunday morning. We try not to add other days of training, we try to do all of them on Sunday morning, so that way the rest of the week is freed up for mission."

Author: "Do you have one service or two?"

Jeff Vanderstelt: "Two. Which makes it convenient to do training during one and a gathering at another as well. We'll train directly after the service on Sunday afternoon since they're already there. We'll say, 'Hey stay after, we'll do some training on this.' But again all, all of our staff have to fulfill one of two things or both. They either are equipping the saints for works of ministry, or they're administering more ministry to equip the saints. But there's not a 'we're gonna pay staff to do ministry to create more programs,' that's not what we do. We, if a program exists it's gotta prove to be effective for equipping people for ministry."

Author: "How do you do leadership development?"

Jeff Vanderstelt: "Uh, a variety of ways, I mean I think that hands on ministry is the best way to develop people, so we, we definitely have formal training, uh, for different kinds of leadership development, but our primary way of developing leaders is through mentorship, is through apprenticeship. Getting them to come alongside an already existing leader, to learn in their field with them, in the area we're gonna lead. Whether that's leading worship, then they're gonna start getting on, you know, part of the worship teams; if it's leading and teaching then [it's] come alongside a teacher; if it's missional community leadership then there's gonna be an apprentice there, so it's always apprenticing under a leader, and then it's got supplemental formal training to, uh, come alongside what they don't yet have. Ideally we try to assess anybody who's gonna enter into a leadership development process, for, to determine what they don't have, we supplement that with a variety of training to fill in the gaps for what they're missing. Unlike, you know like bible school or seminary, you know most, unfortunately most education in America it doesn't, it isn't so much competency based, it's get 'em through the curriculum, and if you get 'em through the curriculum, then you feel great. We don't do that. We're not just after getting people through the curriculum, it's like, 'What competencies do you already have? Which ones are you lacking? And how do we develop that?' And then it's very high character based. For me, uh, so much of leadership development has less to do with competency and more to do with character. Because that's where most people get messed up, it's their character. So it's, the only way I know how to do that is hands on observable training, we gotta be in their life, be in their home, be in their family, you know be

with them. If you're not with them, then you'll never know the character. Because you can fake character in, in, through performance, so."

Author: "Okay."

Jeff Vanderstelt: "I hope I answered that question sufficiently, it's a mixture of formal and informal, and I could give you, you know we have different tracts for different things, you know, whether it's a deacon, elder, missional community leader, worship leader, like..."

Author: "Well, I'm thinking missional community leader, what, do you have a specific track, do you have curriculum? What do you do?"

Jeff Vanderstelt: "Yep. Well, we have videos we've created that they go through on their own, and then they go...they process them in a cohort, uh, to talk about how they're putting those into practice. And then they put it into practice in their missional community. So you, you wouldn't be able to be trained as a missional community leader apart from being in a missional community, or being in a pilot group missional community, which is a new start, uh, it's kind of a 8-12 week pilot of a missional community with very specific training, you're going through... presently we're using the *Saturate Field Guide* for that, for pilot groups. For others we're using all the videos we've created, um, that you can find on the saturate site as well. And it's a two year program, so they do a two year training track. It doesn't mean they can't lead a missional community for two years, it just means if they're gonna lead one they need basic training, and then they get ongoing training for at least two years through those videos."

Author: "Okay, so those videos are available then?"

Jeff Vanderstelt: "They are, yep."

Author: "For purchase? Or are they just online?"

Jeff Vanderstelt: "You um, so some are free online, and you can also buy, like, for use for the entire church, so basically it's a one time, you pay it, and you get usage of it as a result. Or you can buy like a, now you can get a subscription where you not only get those tools, but you get all the new one's that keep getting developed, and you get brought into an online community to learn with others, and then you can create your own online community in house for your own church, and it's leaders to process through what they're learning, um, while they're going through the training. We've developed them more recently the more we've realized the churches need the help, we just started saying what could we provide to help them make the transition."

Author: "What's the website?"

Jeff Vanderstelt: "saturatetheworld.com."

Author: “Okay, so for men’s and women’s ministry, if you don’t have a separate men’s ministry or a separate women’s ministry, then how are you doing discipleship trying to get men and women together for closer connections?”

Jeff Vanderstelt: “Yeah, that would be in missional community and DNA groups. So, missional community is mixed, men and women. But for us, missional community isn’t a once a week meeting, it’s a family. So they’re getting together throughout the week for a variety of things, whatever they think they need. And then the DNA group is where the guys specifically are pouring into other guys, and the ladies are pouring into other ladies. And we’ve found, that the best way to do discipleship of men is with the men they spend the most time with so they can watch their life, watch their marriage, watch their parenting. So ideally, the best way to do it is to get the men who are in the same missional community to be in the same DNA groups together so they can watch how they’re practicing what they say they believe. I’ve been amazed how many guys have been in accountability groups tell all their friends they have a great marriage, and then you go talk to their wives and they have a terrible marriage, and a few years later their divorced, and it’s because no one ever saw both of them together to know that there’s a lot of problems. So, we try to integrate that a lot more. I think potentially men’s and women’s ministry, though I’m not against them, can actually lead to a divided household if you’re not careful. So you gotta be really, you gotta have more integration than we presently have in a lot of those ministries. Um, we will do, like, it’s not like we’re opposed to women big group events, um, we’ll be hosting a gathering next year call ‘If,’ I think we’re doing it at our place, it’s for all women to come together, hear from some teachers, do some worship together, like we’re not opposed to stand alone, even like a men’s breakfast once a quarter, but for us even there we’d encourage you to come with your missional community guys, get into you DNA groups in the room, practice what we just taught you with so you can process it together with the guys. We’re gonna walk it out together in, in life. So always we’ll connect it back to where we believe the most effective discipleship is gonna take place.”

Author: “How do you involve children in your missional community groups?”

Jeff Vanderstelt: “There’s a variety of answers to that. So, it depends on the group, it depends on the mission, it depends on the ages. Um, most of them are integrated in that when they have their weekly meal together, they’re all eating together, hanging out together, um, some groups choose to have somebody there to watch the kids during certain times if they’re really little, if they’re gonna have a hard time engaging, some choose to actually do developmental discipleship with the kids, uh, in another room so that they going through the *Story of God* together, learning the entire narrative of the Bible with, you know, with all ages in the room. So they’re all very different. Some pick a mission the kids can be involved in, uh, like for instance my mission has to do with my kids school, so it’s their disciple-, they’re making disciples, they’re a part of reaching their friends and their friends’ family, and I think that’s the best way to do mission, to do intergenerational when that includes the kids, and they get to be a part of it. Um, this, the reason why most people don’t know how to integrate children is

because they largely do, most of their discipleship is just cognitive, um, curriculum based. So, it's just like study the Bible and talk about it, not get out and practice mission, practice disciple making. And that's why, whenever you're usually talking intergenerational mission with most churches you get-, their eyes go kinda blank, because they're still thinking curriculum based, cognitive development, so they can only think age based at that point. And I think there's a place for that, it's just that a missional community has that and a lot of other things to it, and so at the cognitive development it might be more age based, but in the practices it's probably much more integrated, intergenerational."

Author: "What about youth ministry?"

Jeff Vanderstelt: "We, um, well at Doxa I can tell you what we're doing, but I think there's lots of different ways to do this as well. Um, we have, we encourage all of your youth to be in a missional community, uh, we antici-, what we do is we see them get into high school is we know it's okay to start getting them into their own missional community, even to start missional communities toward their school, um, so that way they start to experience that, kinda, leaving. They already have a...intuitively they're already moving towards independence and so we wanna affirm that process of their development by helping them to be in a missional community, possibly apart from their parents. It doesn't mean they all do that, but we encourage them to start to get involved with others. Um, but as a whole the way we deal with youth ministry is we want to see every single student in an MDNA group, which is a Mentor DNA group, so an older adult male with younger teenage kids, boys, or an older adult female with teenage girls. And so, similar to the DNA concept, but having an adult led one so that they mentor them. And that is meant to be done in conjunction with the parents' disciples plan for their children, which we, when we do training for both teenage, age youth, as well as elementary and below, we have our, our children's ministry director's job is to equip the parents to make disciples of their kids. Uh, alongside of also helping Sunday be staffed well, and how we care of our kids there, but that she also, along with her team, works to go visit missional communities and helps them think through how they're doing discipleship of youth and discipleship of students, or kids in their groups. So she provides training for parents that we offer during a Sunday morning gathering for parents of elementary students, and then she offers another one in the evening when all of our middle school and high school students come together for their larger gathering, um, for their equipping and development as well. So she'll do it with teenage parents during that event. So we have a weekly gathering that's large group, we have missional community, and then we have DNA groups, same structure for student ministry.

"And we're fine with not all students coming to the same student ministry, we just want to make sure that they're in those three things somewhere. Ideally when they're in high school they're coming to Sunday gathering, in a missional community integrated with all the generations, and then in an MDNA group. When they're in middle school, um, Sunday gathering in the evening, and a missional community that might even be reaching their campus with them, and then an MDNA group. A lot of our middle school students are in a missional community with their parents still."

Author: "Does it feel like this might be too much, so Sunday, Missional Community Group, DNA Group? That sounds like three things during the week that you're doing."

Jeff Vanderstelt: "Does that sound too much for people you mean? For adults or for students?"

Author: "Yeah. Well I'm just thinking about you know at our church we have Home Communities, and then we tried to establish DNA groups, but it was hard to sustain because we also had AWANA."

Jeff Vanderstelt: "Okay, yeah we don't have any other programs, so our whole week is completely free. We have nothing going on that the church runs all week long. So the only thing we have going on is what they would be doing. And, um, even with that I'm dealing with very busy people, which you know, people on the east side, Bellevue area, and so some of them would say what we're doing is too much so they would do DNA groups during their Missional Community meeting once a week. So they'll have a meal together and break up into their DNA groups that way. Some of them do it on Sunday morning during the gathering. They use the gathering time to do their DNA group. Uh, so they might attend with their family and do a DNA group during the gathering and attend the gathering and vice-versa. Um, I've found that once people realize how important it is to have someone in their life developing them, they make the time. Because they make the time for what matters most. So I know lots of people who go to baseball games and football games and soccer games. They have plenty of time for the things that matter to them. So once they realize, 'Man, I need a couple guys in my life,' they'll get up early before work to go out to coffee with some guys and talk about Jesus and then go to work. We have a lot of guys who will take their lunch break and do their DNA group during their lunch break at work, you know, on the Microsoft campus or downtown Bellevue at a Starbucks, or whatever. We have a lot of people who just use their rhythms of life where they'll just eat a meal and do DNA group over a meal. Or their morning coffee. So, once they put that in the rhythm of their life it's really not that difficult. Again it's not so highly programmatic that it takes anything more than, 'Hey, let's get together and open up the Bible and work on each other's hearts for an hour.' But again, we don't have anything else, it's, we have no other programs, there's nothing to compete against."

Author: "So do you see that there would be an advantage...so at our church we have AWANA and youth group on Wednesday night, we have Home Communities, and we have Sunday morning, that's pretty much it, so is there an advantage to continuing doing youth and children's ministry that way?"

Jeff Vanderstelt: "If it's making disciples who make disciples, um, I mean, yeah. I was in a church in Kent when I first moved back to the Seattle area before I planted, and they fought for AWANA going all the way up to high school. And I said, 'Well, I'm not gonna be against that as long as your kids are learning to make disciples of non-believing kids, leading them to Christ, and then training them up, walking with Christ.' I had one kid who was fighting me on it, you know, and he was like, 'Well I'm a disciple, and I'm mature.' And I said, 'Okay, well tell me about your non-believing friends.' And he said, 'I don't have any.' And I said, 'Tell me about one person you've led to Christ.' He said, 'I never had.' Then I said, 'Well then you're not a disciple who makes disciples. So don't tell me AWANA's trained you well, because until you can point to people that you've led to Christ and developed to be disciple makers, then you're still a very young Christian in a lot of ways. Just cause you memorized a lot of Scripture doesn't make you mature.' Um, so I fought against that not because I was anti-AWANA, because I think you can do AWANA in very effective disciple-making ways, but they weren't willing to go there. They didn't want it to be a disciple-making ministry. They want it to be a way their son can get scholarships for, for Christian colleges. So they were motivated from a very different motivational structure. So I wasn't gonna keep a program going just for one family that was gonna fight me on it. But if it would have been for the whole church being disciple-makers, I would have kept it. But it wasn't, so, so we just reduced it to children, because it was seemed [sic] to work really well at reaching the neighborhood kids. They seemed to still be connecting to it because it was kind of a Boy Scouts kinda feel to it, because at that point it seemed to make sense culturally. I don't know if it still does, that's maybe a question I'd want to wrestle with. But I think...seems like kids are so busy these days, with so many activities, it feels like adding one more thing, might be taking them out of the mission field they could be in. Like their sporting events or other things their parents seem to be very committed to. I would rather take the things that are already going on in their world and then train them how to do those things with more gospel intentionality than they're probably used to. But, if they've got the time and the space and the margin to add another event, and still be engaged missionally where they're at, then I'd say I wouldn't have a problem with it, I'm just not sure that many kids do. Kids seem to be very busy these days."

Author: "Okay, so let me ask, uh, for missional Home Communities. Is it they type of thing where you do it...where you have a discussion based off the sermon? Or do you do some type of book or something like that?"

Jeff Vanderstelt: "We, we first of all try to assess each Missional Community to try to figure out what they need. And, um, we assess them on how good are they at loving like family? How good are they at serving in tangible forms to show the Kingdom of God breaking into the world...with unbelievers? And then how effective are they in a non-believing context reaching lost people? And then of course we have several other things we assess: their ability to pray, read the Bible, share their faith, walk in the Spirit, we have a whole assessment we walk through with the group and with the individuals. And as we get a good sense of where they're actually at, then we'll recommend, 'You might need to do a curriculum for a while.' Or, you know, 'It seems like you're doing really well, this

next series we're doing a sermon based series that's gonna help you in the area that you're weak. Why don't you engage that, intentionally?' Some we'll say, 'You know, you've been doing Bible study way too long, you don't have a friend that's not a believer, start spending way more time during your weekly meal with unbelievers instead of just with believers.' So it'll all depend on how we assess where the group's actually at. So we don't have a one size fits all that we expect everybody to do together, we're gonna make it more catered to their unique place in their group."

Author: "So is that assessment personal communication between pastors and people you're trying to mentor? Or is it accountability...what tool do you use?"

Jeff Vanderstelt: "So every Missional Community, uh, leader, or team of leaders, cause a lot of our Missional leaders are led by a plurality of leadership, uh, they all have coaches. A lot of those coaches are elders, or at least overseen by elders. We expect every one of our elders to oversee our Missional Communities, so all of our Missional Communities have a direct elder over them whose working either as the coach or with the coach in determining what's going on in the group, whose in the group, where they're at spiritually, what they need next. And then they're helping them craft a plan, and they meet with them once a month for coaching to help them think through how to lead their group, how to effectively adjust the group. So that's a monthly coaching cohort they're a part of. Um, and we do that right after the Sunday gathering, they're watching videos on their own, and then they'll process it in cohorts, that's a two hour block once a month."

Author: "Let me ask, during Seahawk season, what's the attendance like fore that?"

Jeff Vanderstelt: "It's, it's not the greatest. Though, I mean it's not terrible because if it's a ten o'clock game, then you're fine. Uh, but then they don't come to the Sunday morning. So we'll lose them there. If it's a one o'clock game, a lot of times what we'll do is try to strategically pick the games that are a little later. Like, okay, it's at four o'clock, we'll do our thing before that. Or we'll tell people, 'Just DVR it, and then throw a party, go watch it later.' So I do that a lot, I talk to our church a lot about, 'You gotta just use technology, you all know how to use it, start using it, and then we'll have a moratorium, no one gets to talk about it, and then we'll all go have a party and watch it.' So that's becoming more popular, actually, where people say, 'Shut up, we're not listening anybody [laughs].' Like I said, this is what leaders do, leaders lead. Leaders make decisions to say no to things for the purpose of what matters most, so. I'm one of them, I'm a huge Seahawks fan."

Author: "I'm a Broncos fan."

Jeff Vanderstelt: "I just watch it later, you know."

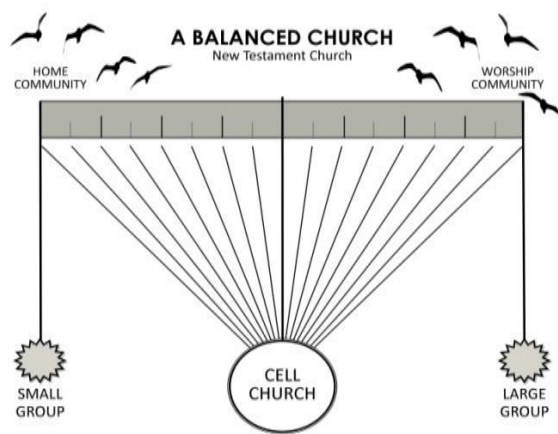
Author: "Yah, I'm gonna end the recording now but, um..."



APPENDIX F

Definition of a “two-winged” or “cell-group” church

Scripture teaches there are two basic regular gatherings of the local church, in homes and as large groups (e.g., Acts 2:42-47; 5:42; and 20:20). Both meetings were necessary for the spiritual and physical growth of the early church as an everyday community. As Christians devoted themselves to the four emphases of Acts 2:42 as an everyday church, the LORD blessed them and added to their number (Acts 2:43-47).

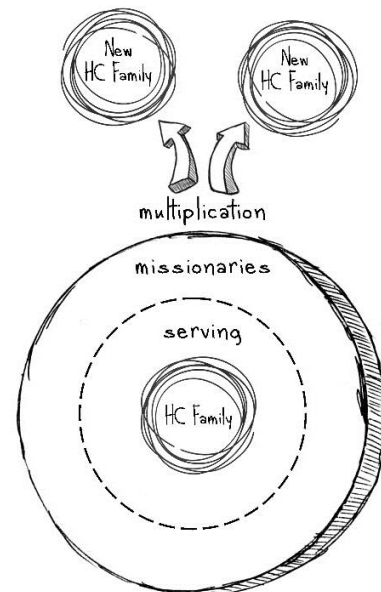


Congregational worship

In the early church, teaching and preaching was primarily conducted during the large group gathering by the Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, and Pastor-Teachers, which had a two-fold purpose: (1) the equipping and edification of believers to do ministry (Ephesians 4:11-16); and (2) the evangelism of seekers (Acts 19:8-10). Therefore, the purposes of Sunday gatherings at Grace Church are: worship, preaching, teaching, evangelism, communion, and prayer.

Missional Home Communities

A small group that meets regularly for the purpose of mutual edification and the application of Scripture to be lived out as an everyday community (Acts 2:42-47; Eph. 4:11-16). The group functions as a mini-church with the leader shepherding the group to become a *family of servant missionaries* who make disciples that make disciples and multiply (Matt. 18:19-20; 1 Peter 2:9).¹



1. Images by Mary Martha (Seattle, WA: Grace Church, January 2016), inspired by Bill Beckham “The Church With Two Wings” in *Church Without Walls*, ed. Michael Green (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2002), 29; also Jeff Vanderstelt, *Saturate: Being Disciples of Jesus in the Everyday Stuff of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 133-146.



APPENDIX G

Elder Roles, Responsibilities, and Covenant

Elder Role & Responsibilities Overview

Your role and responsibility as an Elder at Grace Church Seattle is that of a shepherd-overseer. The primary way to accomplish this is as a Home Community (HC) leader in the area in which you live. Your role as an HC leader has two specific objectives that require the majority of your focus, time, prayer, and energy as an elder.

1. **Lead a mini-church of mutual edification:** Build covenant community between Christ-followers of Grace Church in your Home Community (HC) that support, serve, and mutually edify one another and which demonstrate the Lordship of Jesus Christ in conjunction with our Mission, Values, & Vision (Acts 2:42-47 & Eph. 4:11-16).
2. **Lead your mini-church to live missionally:** Come together as a *family of servant missionaries that multiply*. Covenant with your HC to introduce non-Christians to Christian community in organic, relational ways that create gospel conversations (Matthew 28:18-20).

Qualifications

- Character quality man in line with 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-10.
- Mature and growing disciple of Jesus who is grounded in Scripture.
- Ability to articulate and explain our doctrine in a shepherding way when asked.
- Genuine love for people demonstrated in ministry and to outsiders.
- Ability to challenge and encourage one another and those under our care.
- Humble, reliable, teachable, team player, seeks the unity of the body of Christ.
- Willing to submit to the counsel of the Scriptures by fellow elders.

Responsibilities – In view of the objectives, your responsibilities include:

- Coordinate with Senior Pastor, and HC Zone Coach to find a host home for your HC.
- Coordinate with Senior Pastor and HC Zone Coach to identify an Apprentice whom you will disciple as a Co-Leader of your HC with the goal of multiplying ministers to lead a new group (Matt. 28:19-20).
- Challenge your HC to commit to Christ and one another, to care for one another, to shepherd one another, and to pray for one another outside of the set time of your group meeting.
- Address care and discipline issues on the front end as a preventative to crisis care and discipline.
- Challenge your HC to introduce unchurched to church community organically (e.g., Everyday Rhythms).
- If time allows and you desire, teach a School of Theology (SofTh) class in coordination with the Senior Pastor and Christian Education (CE) director.
- When necessary, participate in extra meetings related to prayer or potential shepherding problems that may occur to work with the Elders-Pastors to bring to resolution in line with the Scriptures.

Everyday Rhythms – Regular activities of an elder.

- Weekly gathering of your HC coordinated with your Host and Apprentice/Co-Lead (Acts 2:42).
- Weekly encourage your HC members to spend time with one another outside the gathering.
- Weekly check-in (phone, text, quick chat at HC or church) with your HC Apprentice/Co-Lead.
- Weekly elder meetings for prayer and ministry of the Word on Sundays, 8am.
- Monthly one-on-one meetings with your Apprentice/Co-Lead for accountability, encouragement, etc.
- Quarterly one-on-one meetings with the Senior Pastor for accountability, encouragement, etc.
- Quarterly Sunday morning church family meetings (Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer Kick-offs).
- Annually meet with pastoral staff for retreat, refreshment, prayer, vision casting, re-organization.

Senior Pastor Role & Responsibilities

Overview

A primary responsibility of the elder of elders at Grace Church is to lead the Elders-Pastors of Grace Church to oversee and shepherd the people God has entrusted to our care. Therefore, in this role has three specific objectives that require focus, time, prayer, and energy to shepherd the elders to this end.

1. **Vision:** The Senior Pastor works together with the Elders-Pastors to cast a vision for how to shepherd Grace Church to make disciples that make disciples (1 Timothy 4:9-16; 5:17). Our vision is *to build Christ-centered family in missional community*. This is about: (1) being a covenantal Christian community; (2) being family together; and (3) reaching the next generation as a multigenerational church (see strategy below). The Senior Pastor is to be a champion of this vision so that it saturates every communication.
2. **Discipleship/Equipping/ Coaching:** A role of the Senior Pastor is to *Disciple* the elders to be godly men of integrity through prayer, counsel, encouragement, training, equipping, and love as a brother, Pastor, and friend. A second role of the Senior Pastor is that of “pastor-teacher” (Eph. 4:12), to *Equip* leaders and the people of Grace Church to do the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:11-16). Finally, the Senior Pastor plays the role of *Coach* together with a team of Zone Coaches to guide the Elders, Pastors, and HC leaders to work together to shepherd / oversee the people of Grace Church (1 Peter 5:1-4; Eph. 4:11-16).
3. **Strategy:** We are purposing to simplify pastoral care and outreach through missional HC groups. To effectively do this requires strategic reproduction of leadership and the multiplication of new groups. This is done through the four-fold strategy and structure of: Celebration (worship), Cell (HC), Equipping (teaching/modeling/mentoring), and Coaching.

Qualifications

- Character quality man in line with 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-10.
- Mature and growing disciple of Jesus who is grounded in Scripture.
- Ability to articulate and explain our doctrine in a shepherding way when asked.
- Genuine love for people demonstrated in ministry and to outsiders.
- Ability to challenge and encourage one another and those under our care.
- Humble, reliable, teachable, team player, seeks the unity of the body of Christ.
- Willing to submit to the counsel of the Scriptures by fellow elders.

Responsibilities – In view of the objectives your responsibilities include (but are not limited to):

- Coordinate with each Elder-Pastor, HC leader and their Zone Coach to find host homes for HC groups.
- Coordinate with each Elder-Pastor, HC leader and their Zone Coach to identify an Apprentice to be discipled as a Co-Leader for each HC with the goal of multiplying ministers to lead new groups (Matt. 28:19-20).
- Challenge Elders, Pastors and HC leaders to shepherd and challenge the people of their HC.
- Address care and discipline issues together with each Elder, Pastor, HC leader, and their Zone Coach Elder through coaching and equipping.
- Challenge the Elders, Pastors, and HC leaders to introduce non-believers to their HC groups.

Rhythms – Regular activities of an elder.

- Weekly check-ins (phone, text, email, quick chat at church) with each Elder.
- Weekly elder meetings for prayer and ministry of the Word on Sundays, 8-9:00am.
- Quarterly 1-on-1 meetings with individual elders for accountability, encouragement, etc.
- Quarterly Sunday morning church family meetings.
- Annually meet with the pastoral staff for a retreat, refreshment, prayer, vision casting, re-organization (when necessary), planning, and calendaring.

Our Covenant

A covenant is a solemn, or formal, commitment in which one or both parties are guaranteeing promises or obligations to one another. Covenant relationship is at the heart of who God is. For our God is a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God and we at Grace Church Seattle are His covenant people established in Jesus Christ.

This gives us the model for a covenant relationship we desire to establish between Elders, Pastors, and missional HC leadership. We covenant together before God and one another to uphold our objectives, qualifications, responsibilities, and rhythms for the purpose of seeing the whole church take the whole gospel to our city.

If you are committed to this covenant, please sign below.

Pastor Ryan Faust (Date)

Chairman Paul (Date)

Vice Chair Barnabas (Date)

Secretary Luke (Date)

Doubting Thomas (Date)

Mathew Levi (Date)

John (Date)

Aquila (Date)



APPENDIX H

Defining *your* Home Community (HC covenant)

First, what is a Home Community? Home Communities (HCs) are small groups based on Acts 2:42-47. The early Christians devoted themselves to the *Apostles' teaching* (New Testament), *fellowship* (sharing in community), *the breaking of bread* (a meal / communion), and *prayer* (praying with and for one another). HCs function like mini-churches. Groups meet weekly with participants devoting themselves to the four elements of Acts 2:42 for mutual *Edification*. But this is more than a Bible study in that the emphasis is on being an *EVERYDAY* church (Acts 2:43-47); hence why groups are based on location to more readily engage in everyday rhythms together. The HC leader is like a shepherd helping individuals discover their spiritual gifts to serve their HC, the larger body, and to live missionally (*Evangelism*). At the center of each group is the Gospel out of which flows our Gospel Identity. When a church functions as it should, it is able to soar to new heights.

Second, what are the basics of how groups are formed and structured?

- † Establish a “*Triad*” (lead, co, host) based on location (North, Central, South).
- † Grace Church HCs have the following characteristics (all based on Acts 2:42-47):
 - ⊕ Breaking bread together (*Acts 2:42-47*).
 - ⊕ Weekly meetings (*Acts 2:42-47*).
 - ⊕ Commit to everyday community (*Acts 2:42-47* – defined by each group).
 - ⊕ Keep confidences (*Acts 2:42* – fellowship).
 - ⊕ Be transparent, willing to share, authentic (*Acts 2:42-47* – fellowship).
 - ⊕ Actively participate in prayer for one another (*Acts 2:42-47*).
 - ⊕ Look out for the good of the whole, assume the best (*Acts 2:42-47* – fellowship).
 - ⊕ Listen well (*Acts 2:42* – part of fellowship and sharing).
 - ⊕ Striving to grow spiritually by applying the word in community (*Acts 2:42-47*).
 - ⊕ Get out of comfort zone to be on mission together (*Acts 2:42-47* – defined by group).
 - ⊕ Be part of a dynamic, open group purposing to multiply as you grow (*Acts 2:42-47*).
 - ⊕ Always inclusive and welcoming to newcomers (*Acts 2:42-47*).
- † Work through a group covenant in between to be led by your HC leader (see below). The basic idea is we (as a group) will all speak into the formation and purpose of our group.
- † Ephesians starting in September: questions in the bulleting/sermon outline each week.
- † Men and women to divide for deeper fellowship once per month.
- † Children – there are options:
 - A. Everyone in the group pools money to pay for baby-sitter (shared expense).
 - B. Include children in the 4Ws, but the lesson time is separate (adult lesson on Ephesians, children’s lesson is based on the Children’s Church story listed in the bulletin).

“There is a tradition (it is not in the Bible) that the world said about the Christians in the early church, “Behold, how they love each other.” As we read Acts and the epistles, we realize that these early Christians were really struggling for a practicing community. We realize that one of the marks of the early church was a real community, a community that reached down all the way to their care for each other in their material needs.”

– Francis Schaeffer, *2 Contents, 2 Realities in 25 Basic Bible Studies*, p. 140

Coming together as a *family*

The Gospel: The Gospel is good news. It is the power of God for salvation by faith in the person & work of Jesus (God's Son), who was crucified on the cross for the sin of the world, and was raised from the dead validating He is Christ and Lord.

Gospel Identity: By confession "Jesus is Lord" and belief God raised Him from the dead I am saved and have been given a new identity in Christ as heir to God's Kingdom. I am now a child of God (family) called to serve our King (servant) sent in the power of the Spirit (missionary) to fulfill Christ's commission to make disciples.

How will we live out our Gospel Identity in our Home Community? The purpose of this HC covenant is to help your group work together to define in more detail what the above will look like in your context.

Family—How can we build a family environment like Christ did with His disciples?

1. At its best, what does your family look like when following Jesus together?
2. What does family do? What does family look like in real life? What are the characteristics of a godly family? How can we develop our HC to have a family feel?
3. How will we make sure all of us know one another's stories? Testimonies?
4. How will we commit to listening in prayer to more effectively pray for one another?
5. What are some everyday things we each do that we can do together (eat, play, etc.)?
6. In what ways will we intentionally celebrate together, and around what?
7. Do we agree these are characteristics of a godly family and want to commit to this together?

Learning to serve each other in community

Servants—How can we serve each other in community like Jesus did with His disciples?

1. What does a servant do? What does it mean to serve?
2. How can we learn our spiritual gifts & use them to serve one another?
3. How could we serve the larger body (Grace Church, other churches) together?
4. How will we intentionally share what we have with one another and those in need?
5. How will we serve each other and the larger body through Spirit-led giving?
6. What projects could we be involved in to bring the restorative work of the Kingdom of God?

Learning to reach out together for Jesus's name

Missionaries—How can we be missionaries like Jesus was with His disciples in community?

1. What does a missionary do?
2. Prayer precedes action: are we committed to pray for God's will? (Acts 1 before 2)
3. Who are we trying to reach with the gospel? How will we try to reach them?
4. What does training & support look like in this communal effort to live missionally? How can we take advantage of what we learn in HC to make disciples who make disciples?
5. Is it okay to individually reach out to people God brings along my path that are outside of "our" mission? Is it okay to invite and bring these people into our community?
6. What dynamics of the group will change when new people enter our group? When unchurched join us?

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